NINTENDO POWER®

Mario Kart 7 • The Legend of Zelda: Skyward Sword • Mario & Sonic at the London 2012 Olympic Games • Super Mario 3D Land • Shinobi • Rayman Origins

273

NOVEMBER 2011

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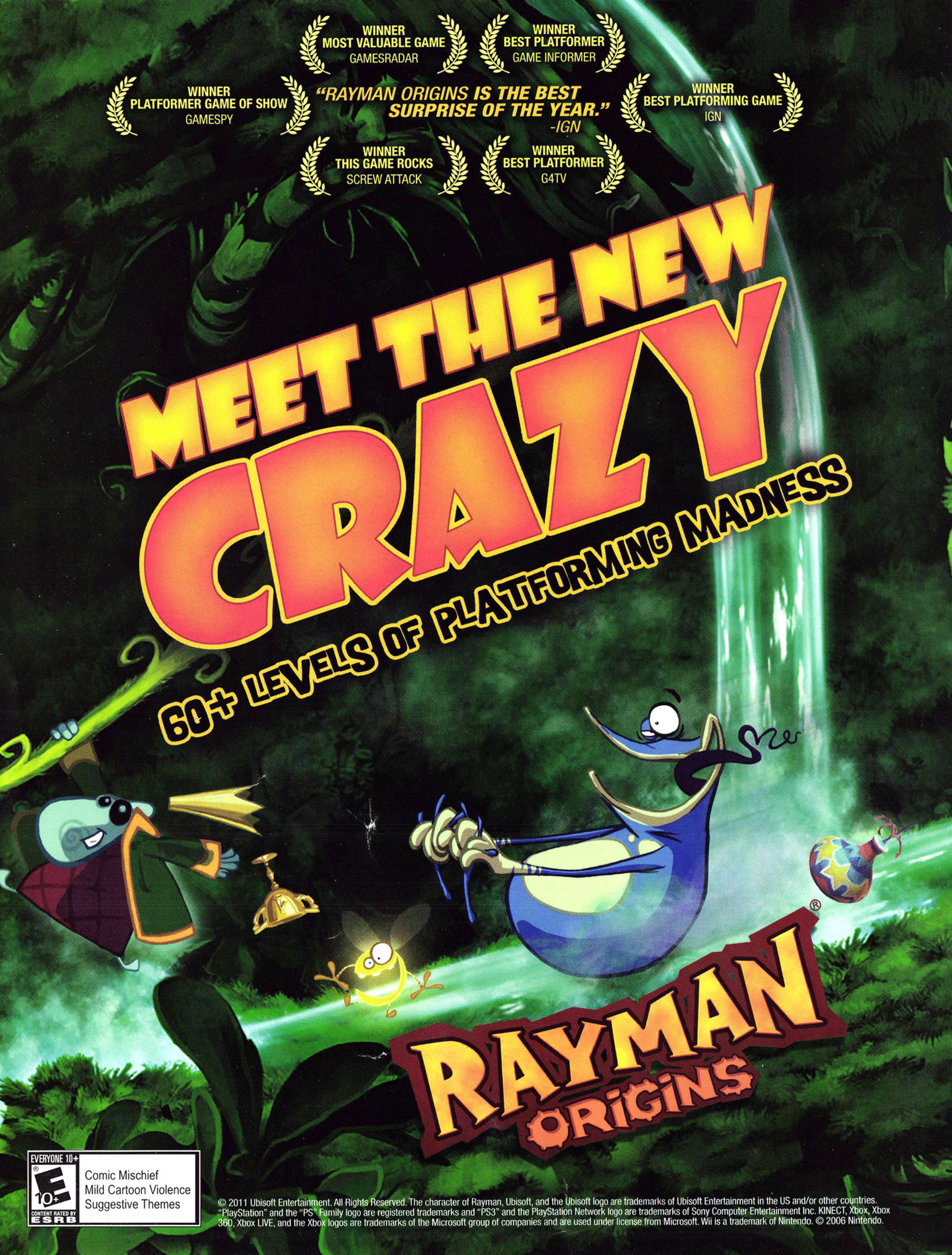
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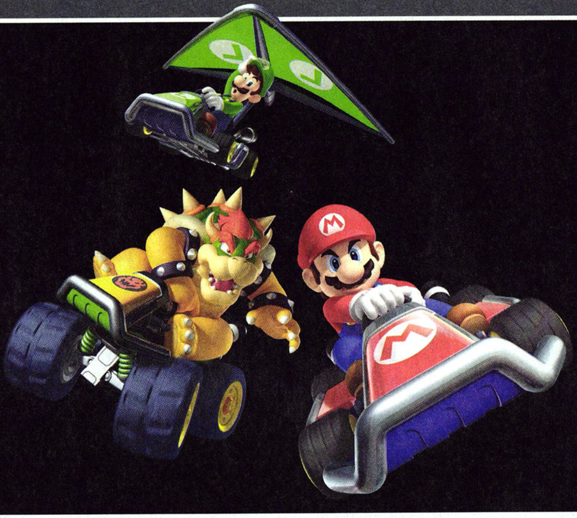
Mario Kart 7 marks the return of Nintendo's popular racing series. We've got seven great reasons why this latest entry should be at the top of everyone's Nintendo 3DS want list. New characters, new items, new tracks—this game has got everything!

Think inside the Cube 50

It was 10 years ago this month that Nintendo released the boxiest of all consoles, the Nintendo GameCube. To celebrate this anniversary, we're taking a look at the top 25 games for the system. If you've not played each of these amazing titles, friend, you've hardly played games at all.



MARIO KART 7 42

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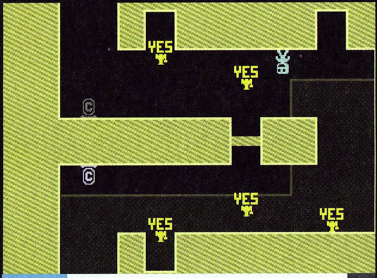

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DS = NINTENDO DS
DW = DSiWARE
N3DS = NINTENDO 3DS
SNES = SUPER NINTENDO ENTERTAINMENT SYSTEM
VC = VIRTUAL CONSOLE
Wii = Wii
WW = WiiWARE

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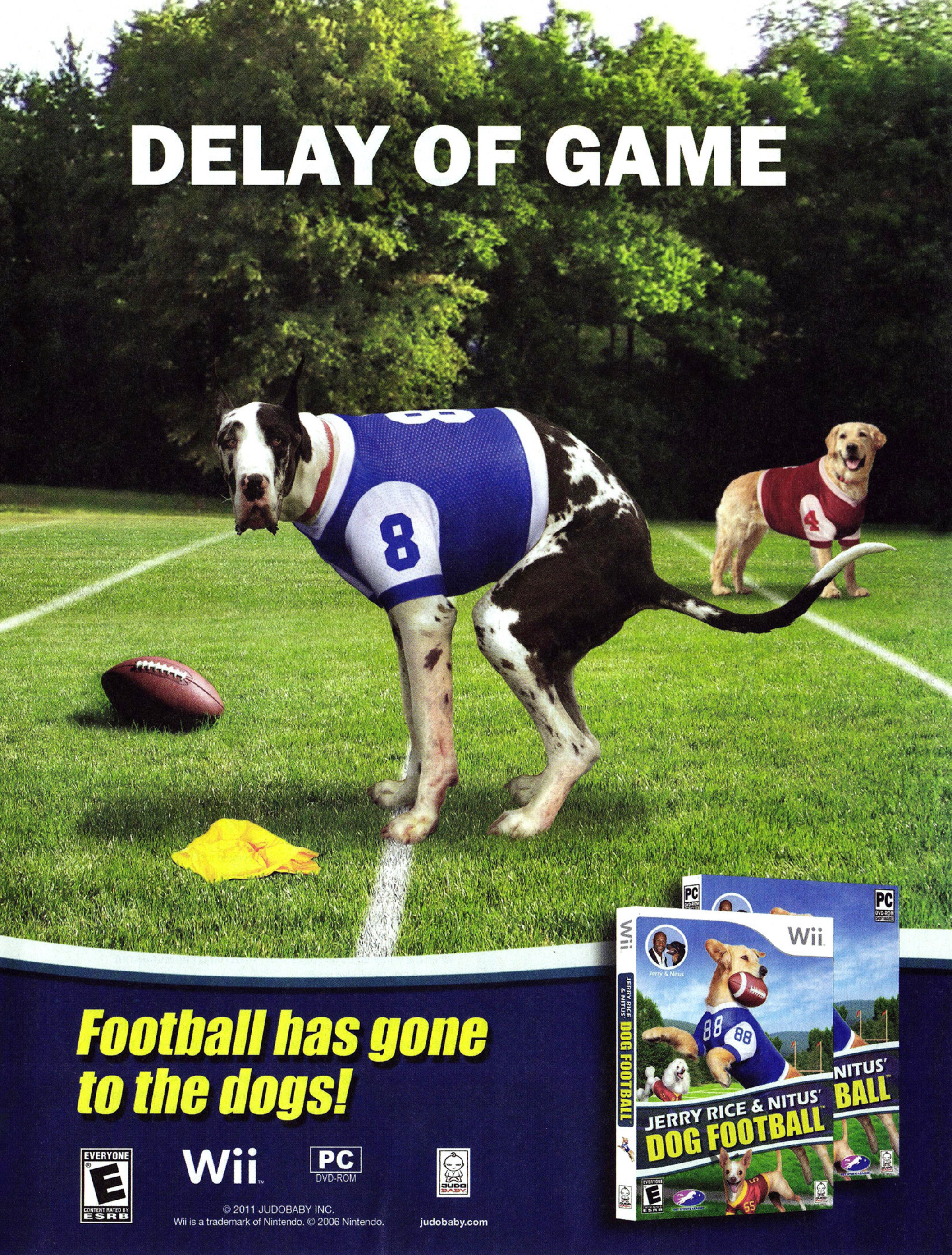
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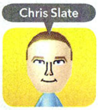
Pulse

I Love Mario Kart, Even When I Hate It

Chris Slate



I really enjoy battling my buddies in the Super Smash Bros. games, competing in Wii Sports events, and talking trash while playing a good Mario sports title, but for me, nothing beats Mario Kart when a couch full of friends are over. It's been that way since the series started, when my best buddy and I used to have heated Battle Mode tournaments with the original Super Mario Kart on the Super NES. With Mario Kart Double Dash!! on the Nintendo GameCube, my friends and I would stay up all night racing through marathon custom tournaments that included every course in the game. There's something amazing about the Mario Kart mix of drift racing, offensive firepower, and defensive strategies; of managing the manic ebb and flow of the race; of mastering the chaos of lightning strikes, ink splatters, and kart-seeking Koopa shells. Mario Kart games can make me angrier than anything else out there, but any outrage at late-race misfortune only fuels my desire to play again and win. If you still love a game even when you want to throttle it, isn't that the ultimate test? When I tear into Mario Kart 7, I know I'm going to curse blue shells, bemoan rubber-band AI, and complain that I don't get enough good items, but you know what? I can't wait.

CHRIS SLATE **EDITOR IN CHIEF**

REVIEWED! KIRBY'S RETURN TO DREAM LAND | PREVIEWED! THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: SKYWARD SWORD

NINTENDO POWER

SUPER MARIO 3D LAND

New intro! New screens! New stages! New suit! Get ready to go nuts!

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ACE COMBAT 3D
TEKKEN 3D: PRIME EDITION
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POKÉMON RUMBLE BLAST PG.64

V272 OCTOBER 2011

Hi! This is The Hoff here, ready and willing to answer your letters! That's right—I've finally wrested control of the whole section from Chris Slate. Booyah! But before I get caught up celebrating, I need to ask: what's your most noteworthy, surprising video game victory (in either a single-player or multiplayer game)? Send your responses to the address on page 8.

LETTERS

Seeing Stars

One of my favorite parts of your magazine is the Star Power section. It's cool to be able to read about the weirdest Nintendo characters like Tingle because you usually don't think about them that much. Have you ever thought about running out of characters to write about in the later future? **—ZELDA BEAST**

Nope, we're not worried about running out in the slightest. We're eagerly awaiting the day we can feature Kin Corn Karn! And if you like Star Power, don't forget to check out the Nintendo Gaming Super Stars special, which features exclusive Star Power entries. You can order your copy at www.nintendopower.com.

What a Twist!

Thanks so much for writing that PlayBack article on Drill Dozer. When the Nintendo DS hit stores I missed Drill Dozer like most people. Luckily, my local game store was getting rid of their GBA games and Drill Dozer stood out. I had been trying to collect interesting titles, and I picked it up. I fell in love with the game right away and was very happy to see it revisited in Nintendo Power! **—DYLAN K.**

That's what we like to hear! The rest of you: follow Dylan's example and check out Drill Dozer if you can.

Mad about Mido

After playing The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time 3D, I developed a strange love for a certain character. Mido, boss of the Kokiri people, is the quirkiest, awesomest villager around. I want to find more Mido out in the world. Are there any games that include him? **—SONG OF JIGGLYPUFF**

Mido appears only in the various versions of The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time, but in Zelda II: The Adventure of Link there's an entire town named after him. Betcha wish you could visit there, eh?

Corrector's Corner: The Revenge

I would just like to point out that in issue 272 you had Rayman Origins as one of the main topics on the subscriber's cover, yet you didn't have any article about Rayman Origins. **—ULTIMATEBOMBBUSTER**

Uh, you called Rhythm Thief & The Emperor's Treasure, in the article's last paragraph, Rhythm Heaven. What's the deal?**—WES R.**

Right you guys are! Obviously, both mistakes were totally Chris Slate's fault; that's why I'm answering these letters and he's not! In all fairness, Rayman Origins was supposed to get a preview, but we had to drop it at the last minute.

I noticed your recent article about Super Mario 3D Land was titled "Keys to the Kingdom." Was that a deliberate reference to the fantasy series written by Garth Nix? If so, great job! —**IAN**

Keys to the Kingdom

Take a tour of the Mushroom Kingdom in Super Mario 3D Land—and bring your Tanooki Suit!

WANT TO KNOW what it's like to play the Nintendo 3DS handheld's most highly anticipated action game? You're in luck—we dug deep into a prerelease version of Super Mario 3D Land and jotted down every last detail, from Bowser's new battle tactics to how it felt to try on Mario's terrific Tanooki Suit. This is the most exhaustive look at the game you'll find before its November release, but don't worry—we won't spoil *too* much. Although our course-by-course tour of the Mushroom Kingdom covers never-before-seen stages and features, we stick to the game's starting areas. So, got your red cap on? Trimmed your mustache? Tanooki tail at the ready? OK, then—here-a we go!

Dark Tidings

I've recently been hearing Ganon referred to as "the Prince of Darkness." I was hoping you guys could tell me—who is the *real* Prince of Darkness: Ganon or Ozzy Osbourne? Or maybe...are they the same person?!? —**GODFATHER GORDON**

You're not even considering that the title could belong to Count Dracula or Wilford Brimley? Geez.

Legal Trouble

As a loyal Ace Attorney fan, I am deeply disappointed by Capcom's decision not to release Ace Attorney Investigations: Miles Edgeworth 2 (or Gyakuten Kenji 2) for the DS in North America. I was really looking forward to the sixth installment in this unique series. The past five games have proven themselves to be extremely well crafted, each composed of complex stories, witty humor, lovable characters, good puzzles, and no continuity issues. I sincerely hope that Capcom reconsiders their decision and re-evaluates a release in North America. —**LAUREN**

As big Ace Attorney fans, we couldn't agree more. We should totally hire Phoenix Wright to sue Capcom if it doesn't come out here.

Lost Classics

I just got the August issue today (it got lost in the mail or something) and I saw that you didn't even mention Kirby's Dream Course, Aero the Acro-Bat, or Stunt Race FX in your SNES feature! Those were my three favorite games of all time! (At least until I got Donkey Kong Country.) —**TOMMY F.**

We know, we know! Every time we run a feature like this, there are awesome games that we just don't have space to include, even when we really want to. We did, at least, acknowledge Stunt Race FX on page 68 of that issue.

Which Came First?

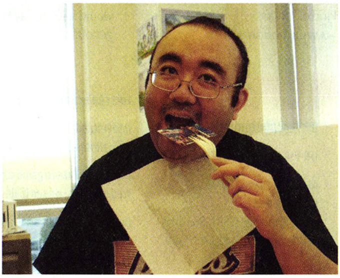
In response to I Am Gamer's letter in Vol. 272 about Marin and Tarin from The Legend of Zelda: Link's Awakening DX being based on characters from 1998's Ocarina of Time, that version of Link's Awakening is a remake. In fact, the original Link's Awakening came out in 1993, five years before Ocarina of Time. —**WOOT21**

You are correct, sir or madam. Marin and Tarin in Link's Awakening came first. This is another reason we had to launch Chris Slate into space.

Not in the Cards

If you run into the people who make Pokémon video games, will you have them sign these cards I sent you? If not, just send them back. —**MARIOMASTER**

What? Are you crazy? Not that we wouldn't want to help, but—for the last time—you really shouldn't send us anything important that you want back. It could get lost in the mail or any number of unexpected things could happen. For example, Justin eats trading cards for breakfast.

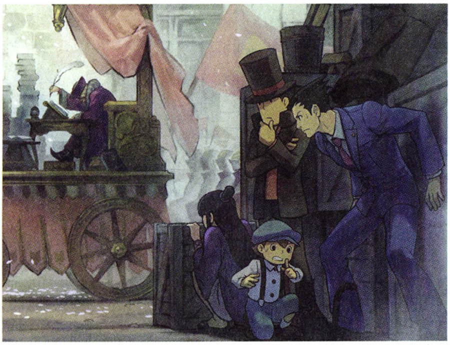


DON'T HASSLE THE HOFF

Hey, Hoffman! I need major help! I've never played a Legend of Zelda game, and I saw one called The Legend of Zelda: Sands of Time, I think. Please, you're the only dude with the skill enough to help me! Please fill me in on the Zelda crew! I really need your help! [Falls to knees and begs.] —**ZELDACHU11**

Liquid Hoff says: Ha! With The Hoff too busy answering regular letters this month, you'll have to deal with *me*! For your information, cretin, there is no Zelda game called Sands of Time! But if there were, it would star me, Liquid Hoff! I would knock out that green-hatted fool with a blow to the cranium when he's not looking, then bury him in the sand, after which Zelda and I would ascend to the heavens in my giant flying robotic time-traveling pegasus! From there we would rule all! Being a benevolent master, I'd allow Ganon to remain in Hyrule, as long as he stayed in pig form and spent his days wallowing in mud.

I'm waiting for the announcement of one game: Professor Layton vs. Phoenix Wright. The day I hear that it is 100 percent certain it will come to the US, I will immediately run to the store and buy an N3DS. **—HOLLY M.**



What are you waiting for to buy a Nintendo 3DS handheld?

If there's one thing holding me back from getting a Nintendo 3DS, it's my parents. I have been saving up for an N3DS the second it came out. Soon getting one wasn't an option—I had to. After the price cut, I had enough money to get one! But my mom said school was starting and she didn't want it to distract me from me homework. She said I can get one during winter break. **—HORNED WITCH**

Honestly, I think the N3DS looks great! It has great-looking games coming out for it, and it has some great games out now. But...I really, really want Nintendo to release Fire Emblem: New Mystery of the Emblem ~Heroes of Light and Shadow~ over here. That's really all I'm holding out for, being the Fire Emblem fan that I am. But, still, the Nintendo 3DS is a system I will definitely purchase eventually! **—TRENT**

One of my friends is holding out for a pink N3DS, and I personally am in deep internal conflict over whether or not the black N3DS is best for showing off my Pokémon stickers. **—NATE B.**

The reason why I haven't bought an N3DS is because I'm waiting for some sort of limited-edition N3DS to come out. The only thing better than having an N3DS is having a limited-edition one!

—CHUCK D. HEAD

I love how there are all these amazing games coming out for the N3DS, but come on, people! Where's Metroid? I want to see some Samus-style action in 3D!

—GREEN GRUB

I'm still not convinced it's the time for me to buy an N3DS. While the price point is perfect and there are some great games on the horizon, I know Nintendo's history of fine-tuning their handhelds. I'll be holding out for the next N3DS hardware iteration—hopefully with improved battery life and a built-in second Circle Pad. Though I may be waiting a while, patience has paid off in the past with the GBA SP and DS Lite. **—REN ROC**

I know that Super Mario Land and Mario Kart 7 are pretty awesome, and lots of upcoming games look even cooler. Yet, I don't have an N3DS yet because, even with the price drop, I (an 11-year-old girl with no allowance) don't have that kind of money.

—AWESOME NINJA 13

I'd love to buy an N3DS, but money is a little tight. My wife and I work as missionaries, and we just started a family. The main excuse I use to talk myself out of the purchase every time I am tempted is that I will wait for a new model with an improved battery life. Without that excuse, I would have bought into the Ambassador Program during those couple days before August 18 when the price dropped early. Wow, that would have been a deal!

—SETRODOX

I'm holding out for a new Kirby game on the N3DS. Imagine sucking up enemies and fighting bosses in stereoscopic 3D! Also, the unnamed Super Smash Bros. game sounds cool too.

—META ZEKROM

Well, I was in line camping out to get a Wii, so it isn't the price. The games and AR Cards already have me sold. They look awesome, so I would have to say I am waiting to get out of prison. **—THANOS**

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Don't send links to game coverage on the Web—trust us; we see it all.

Don't ask about the status of upcoming games, or whether certain games will be announced; if we have that info, we'll always tell you.

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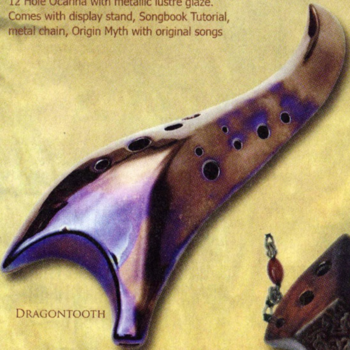

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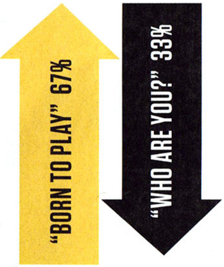
BEST GAMECUBE AD SLOGAN?



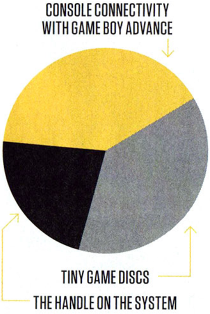
F-ZERO GX IS...

A nice challenge. 53%

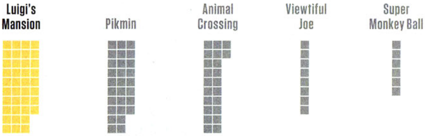
I'm going to lie and say it isn't hard at all. 25%

Way too tough. 22%

WHICH ASPECT OF THE GAMECUBE DO YOU MISS THE MOST?



WHICH IS THE BEST FRANCHISE TO DEBUT ON THE NINTENDO GAMECUBE?

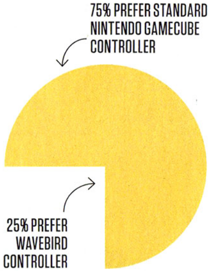


THE GRAPHICS IN

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: THE WIND WAKER

Are a timeless work of art 83%

Are not my cup of tea 17%



DID YOU KNOW THAT IF YOU HOLD THE Z BUTTON WHEN TURNING ON THE GAMECUBE, YOU'LL HEAR A BABY LAUGH?

WHAT?! 53%

YEP! 47%

52 PERCENT

PURPLE GAMECUBE

48 PERCENT

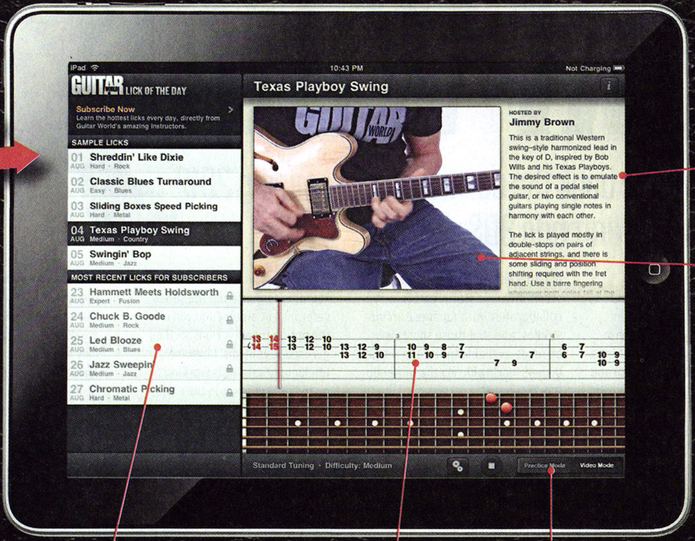
BLACK GAMECUBE

GUITAR WORLD LICK OF THE DAY

A MUST-HAVE APP FOR EVERY GUITARIST

from the brilliant minds at GUITAR WORLD and AGILE PARTNERS

OPTIMIZED FOR ¡PAD! – use it on the iPhone and iPod touch, too!



iPad 10:43 PM Not Charging

GUITAR WORLD LICK OF THE DAY

Subscribe Now
Learn the hottest licks every day, directly from Guitar World's amazing instructors.

SAMPLE LICKS

01 AUG Shreddin' Like Dixie — Hard · Rock
02 AUG Classic Blues Turnaround — Easy · Blues
03 AUG Sliding Boxes Speed Picking — Hard · Metal
04 AUG Texas Playboy Swing — Medium · Country
05 AUG Swingin' Bop — Medium · Jazz

MOST RECENT LICKS FOR SUBSCRIBERS

23 AUG Hammett Meets Holdsworth — Expert · Fusion
24 AUG Chuck B. Goode — Medium · Rock
25 AUG Led Blooze — Medium · Blues
26 AUG Jazz Sweepin' — Medium · Jazz
27 AUG Chromatic Picking — Hard · Metal

Texas Playboy Swing

HOSTED BY
Jimmy Brown

This is a traditional Western swing-style harmonized lead in the key of D, inspired by Bob Wills and his Texas Playboys. The desired effect is to emulate the sound of a pedal steel guitar, or two conventional guitars playing single notes in harmony with each other.

The lick is played mostly in double-stops on pairs of adjacent strings, and there is some sliding and position shifting required with the fret hand. Use a barre fingering whenever both notes fall at the

Standard Tuning · Difficulty: Medium

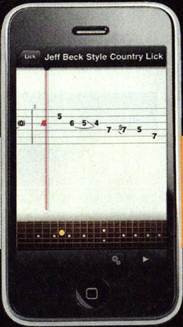
Performance notes written by GUITAR WORLD

High-quality video demonstrations with full-screen option!

Hundreds of licks in all styles – rock, metal, blues, country, jazz – with a new lick delivered every day

Standard and tab music notation for each lick that scrolls in sync with the video

Practice mode lets you control tempo, looping and metronome



Learn a new lick every day with GUITAR WORLD's award-winning instructors and guest celebrities like **Zakk Wylde, Joe Satriani and more!**

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NEWS *from* JAPAN

Next Wave

Nintendo pulls back the curtain on a promising 2012 lineup for the Nintendo 3DS.

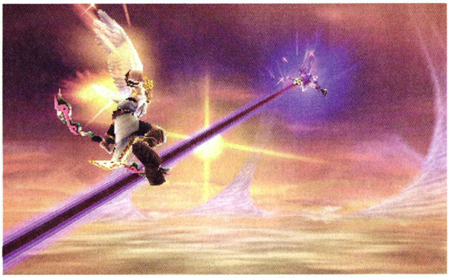
AFTER GETTING OFF to a slow start, the Nintendo 3DS handheld is picking up steam with its recent price cut and the imminent release of marquee titles like Super Mario 3D Land (see the review on page 70) and Mario Kart 7 (the subject of our cover story; see page 42). With an eye toward building on that momentum, Nintendo held a press conference in Japan to offer a glimpse of what it has in store for 2012.

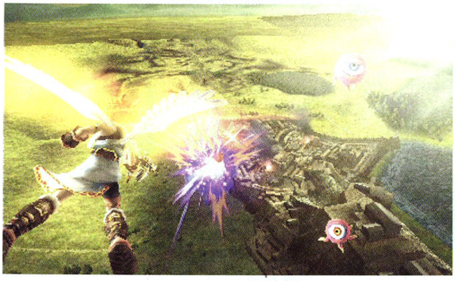
That includes Kid Icarus: Uprising, which has been delayed from its original 2011 release date to give Masahiro Sakurai and his team more time to polish the game. The good news is that Pit's long-awaited return to the spotlight looks incredible in the latest batch of screenshots. Nintendo also announced that it's developing a series of 3D Kid Icarus cartoons in collaboration with Japanese anime studios, and that those shorts will be made available for free to N3DS owners worldwide via the Nintendo Video service.

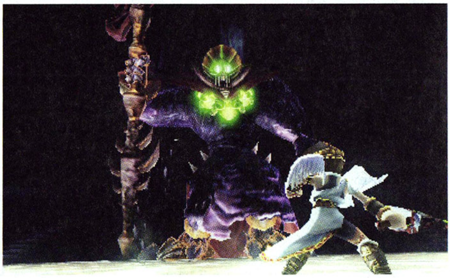
In addition, the company released new images from Animal Crossing, Luigi's Mansion 2, and Paper Mario. Little new information on those titles was offered, aside from the fact that Animal Crossing will incorporate SpotPass features, plus allow players to serve as the village chief for the first time in franchise history. (Hopefully that means we'll finally get the chance to bring nefarious kingpin Tom Nook to justice!)

Lastly, a number of brand-new titles were revealed at the conference. We learned that a new Mario Tennis is coming from the series veterans at Camelot and will offer the option for as-yet-unspecified gyroscope controls. Likewise, Intelligent Systems is working on the next chapter in the Fire Emblem saga, which will introduce a two-player co-op mode. And a new network-enabled version of the acclaimed Culdcept franchise will bring its addictive, Monopoly-meets-Magic: The Gathering gameplay to N3DS courtesy of OmiyaSoft. These last three titles have yet to be announced for a North American release, but we're keeping our fingers crossed. **—STEVE T.**

KID ICARUS: UPRISING

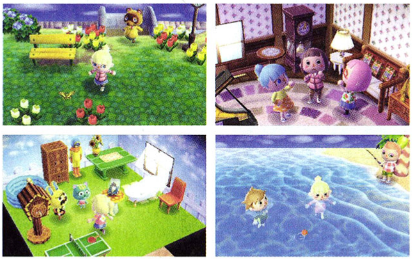




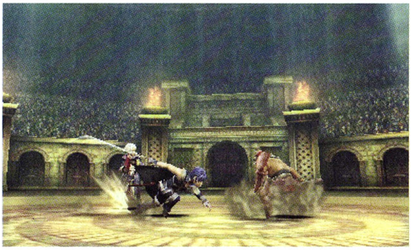


SCREENSHOTS HAVE BEEN CAPTURED IN 2D MODE.

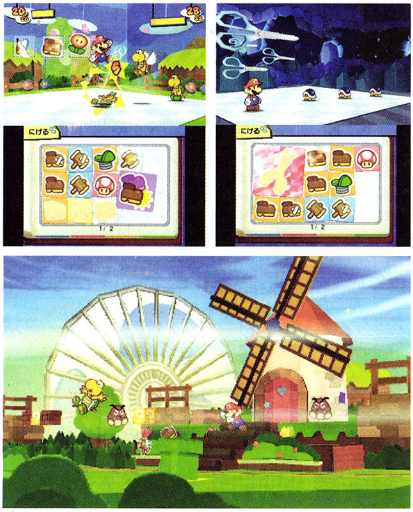
ANIMAL CROSSING*



FIRE EMBLEM*



PAPER MARIO*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28
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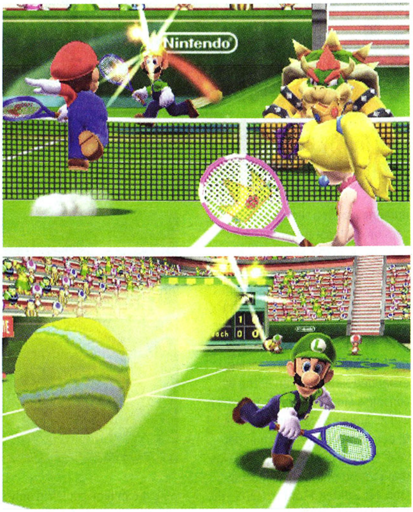
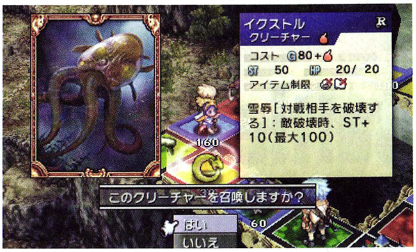
1/2
にげる
1/2

MARIO TENNIS*



CULDCEPT*



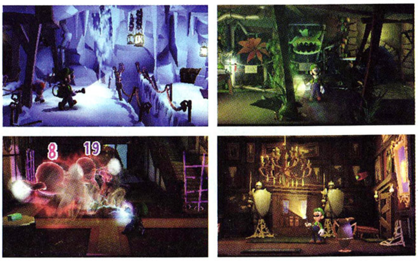
イクストル R
クリーチャー
コスト G80+
ST 50 HP 20/ 20
アイテム制限

雪辱［対戦相手を破壊する］：敵破壊時、ST+10（最大100）

このクリーチャーを召喚しますか？

160
60
はい
いいえ

LUIGI'S MANSION 2

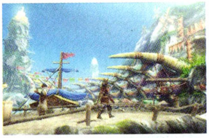


*NAMES NOT FINAL

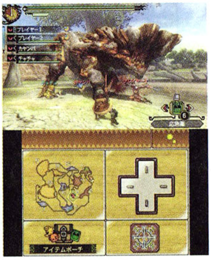
Unleashing the Monster

NEWS *from* JAPAN

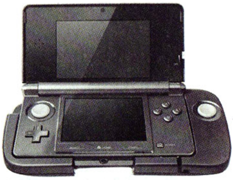
Two newly announced **Monster Hunter** titles look to give the Nintendo 3DS a major boost in Japan.



RUMORS ABOUT a Nintendo 3DS version of Monster Hunter had been flying in the weeks before Nintendo's pre-Tokyo Game Show press conference, but the specifics of the official announcement still sent shockwaves throughout the industry. The first surprise was that Capcom would be releasing an expanded N3DS version of the Wii console's Monster Hunter Tri, which will be known as Monster Hunter Tri G, before the end of the calendar year. But the bigger bombshell was that the company is also making Monster Hunter 4 for the N3DS—the first numbered sequel ever developed for a handheld platform. The series's most recent handheld installment (Monster Hunter Portable 3rd for PSP) sold a stunning 4.6 million copies in only its first few months of release, so the two upcoming titles are expected to drive Japanese N3DS hardware sales for years to come.



Monster Hunter Tri G (pictured here) features most of the areas and monsters of the Wii title, as well as at least one brand-new monster and several additional monsters from other entries in the series. The N3DS game offers an expanded arsenal of weapons and lets players customize the touch screen with maps, camera controls, and an item pouch that allows for easy access to frequently used items. There will be support for local wireless play, as well as SpotPass features that have yet to be revealed. Capcom didn't announce any details about Monster Hunter 4, but the promotional video for it suggested a new focus on environmental interaction, with significantly larger hunting grounds full of destructible elements. **—CASEY L.**



MEET THE N3DS SLIDE PAD

Wii title Monster Hunter Tri was built to take advantage of the dual analog sticks and multiple shoulder buttons of the packed-in Classic Controller Pro, so Nintendo will be releasing a new "slide pad" peripheral in Japan, intended to replicate the Wii game's control scheme on the N3DS. Sold for under $20, the pad snaps onto the bottom portion of the handheld, adding a second Circle Pad and another row of shoulder buttons. The slide pad will be compatible with several other high-profile third-party games, including Resident Evil Revelations, Metal Gear Solid: Snake Eater 3D, and Kingdom Hearts 3D: Dream Drop Distance. No word yet on a North American release for the peripheral.

Battle and Boogie

The fall season brings big new events to the Pokémon Global Link.

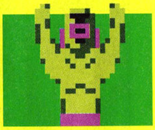
Carnival Pokémon
10/20/11

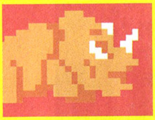
FEELING FOOTLOOSE AND fancy-free? Then enter the password NPMUSICAL at the promotions page of the Pokémon Global Link website (www.pokemon.com/pgl), then use Game Sync to add the new Carnival Pokémon Musical show to your copy of Pokémon Black Version or Pokémon White Version! The next time you visit Nimbasa City's Musical Theater (assuming you've made it that far in the adventure), you can experience the show and put your Pokémon through the paces of an exclusive new dance.

In other PGL news, The Pokémon Company International recently hosted its first-ever online tournament—the Pokémon Autumn Friendly—which ran October 20–23. Players from all over the world competed with Pokémon from the Unova region on the Global Battle Union. At press time the winners hadn't yet been crowned, but the tournament results and winners will be posted on November 1 at www.pokemon.com/pgl. Be sure to check 'em out! **—CHRIS S.**

A WINNER IS...

Dave's Hot 'N Juicy.





DODONGO DISLIKES...

Broken review builds at deadline.

“DID SOMEBODY PAGE THE KING OF AWESOME?”

—BOWSER, MARIO & LUIGI: BOWSER'S INSIDE STORY, 2009

NINTENDO POWER

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Future
MEDIA WITH PASSION

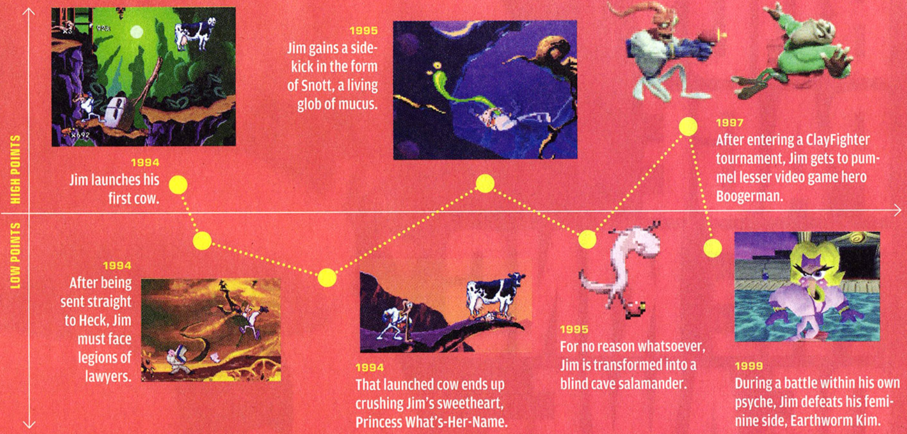
FIRST APPEARANCE:
EARTHWORM JIM
SEGA GENESIS, 1994

STAR POWER
A closer look at the characters we love

Earthworm Jim

Not content to live a life of eating dirt, a worm dons a Super Suit and shows evil that clothes truly make the man.

CAREER GRAPH



1994
Jim launches his first cow.

1994
After being sent straight to Heck, Jim must face legions of lawyers.

1994
That launched cow ends up crushing Jim's sweetheart, Princess What's-Her-Name.

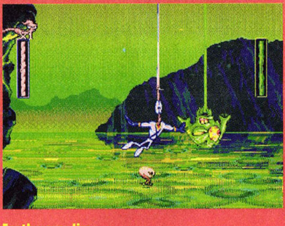
1995
Jim gains a sidekick in the form of Snott, a living glob of mucus.

1995
For no reason whatsoever, Jim is transformed into a blind cave salamander.

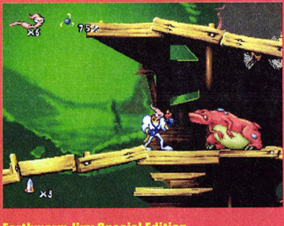
1997
After entering a ClayFighter tournament, Jim gets to pummel lesser video game hero Boogerman.

1999
During a battle within his own psyche, Jim defeats his feminine side, Earthworm Kim.

OUR FAVORITE EARTHWORM JIM GAMES



Earthworm Jim
SEGA GENESIS, 1994
Jim's first appearance instantly endeared the annelid to gamers. The title featured outstanding graphics, fluid animation, and large, sprawling levels. Fans also loved the game's sense of humor, which manifested itself through goofy voice samples, zany non sequiturs, and a variety of crazy villains, such as Evil the Cat and Professor Monkey-for-a-Head.

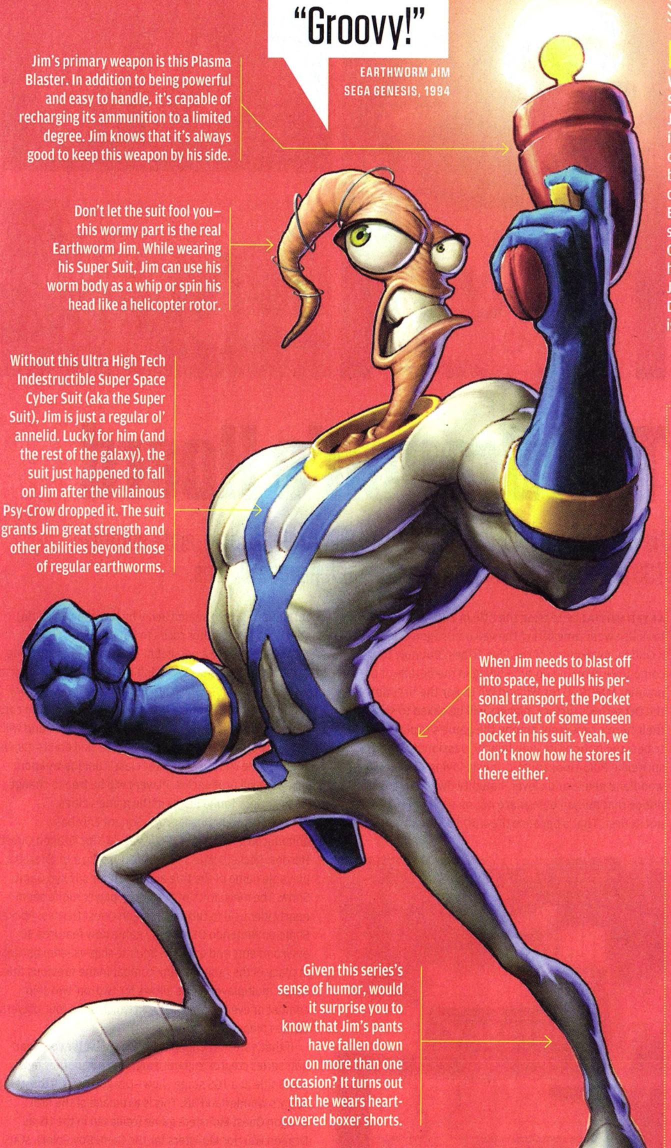


Earthworm Jim: Special Edition
SEGA CD, 1995
OK, we're cheating a bit with this entry since it's simply an enhanced version of Jim's first adventure. Goodies such as extra animation, additional voice samples, and altered endings are nice, but newly introduced features—extended levels, a CD-quality soundtrack, and a brand-new stage—really make it worth revisiting this classic platform game.

Earthworm Jim 2
SUPER NES, 1995
This sequel takes the craziness of its predecessor and cranks it up. This is especially evident in the variety of odd new levels. You'll guide Jim as he dodges overweight natives while riding his rocket, catches puppies with a giant marshmallow, journeys through a world of meat, and enters a quiz show. Don't miss the shocking twist ending!

“Groovy!”

EARTHWORM JIM
SEGA GENESIS, 1994



Jim’s primary weapon is this Plasma Blaster. In addition to being powerful and easy to handle, it’s capable of recharging its ammunition to a limited degree. Jim knows that it’s always good to keep this weapon by his side.

Don’t let the suit fool you—this wormy part is the real Earthworm Jim. While wearing his Super Suit, Jim can use his worm body as a whip or spin his head like a helicopter rotor.

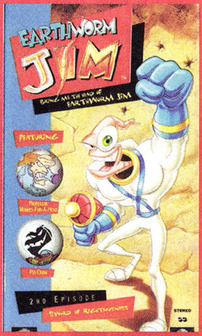
Without this Ultra High Tech Indestructible Super Space Cyber Suit (aka the Super Suit), Jim is just a regular ol’ annelid. Lucky for him (and the rest of the galaxy), the suit just happened to fall on Jim after the villainous Psy-Crow dropped it. The suit grants Jim great strength and other abilities beyond those of regular earthworms.

When Jim needs to blast off into space, he pulls his personal transport, the Pocket Rocket, out of some unseen pocket in his suit. Yeah, we don’t know how he stores it there either.

Given this series’s sense of humor, would it surprise you to know that Jim’s pants have fallen down on more than one occasion? It turns out that he wears heart-covered boxer shorts.

MIND OF A WORM

What goes on inside the brain of a Super Suit-wearing invertebrate? In Earthworm Jim 3D (released on the Nintendo 64 in 1999) we found out. After a flying cow renders Jim comatose, players must battle through Jim’s subconscious, facing off against classic foes like Psy-Crow and Bob the Killer Goldfish, as well as new ones such as an alien chef named Fatty Roswell. Only after players successfully open up his mind and restore his intelligence can Jim confront his greatest inner demon. Despite the interesting premise, EWJ 3D isn’t nearly as good as Jim’s 2D adventures.



JIM ON THE AIR

In 1995, Universal Animation Studios created an animated series based on Jim’s adventures. During the 23 episodes (spread out over two seasons), Jim battles his video game adversaries and a twisted doppelganger named Evil Jim, who was created after a freak photocopy-machine mishap. Not surprisingly, Jim’s exploits tend to be a little out of the ordinary. He manages to find a pop-up book that contains the key to destroying the universe, and he embarks on an epic, galaxy-spanning quest to return a neighbor’s egg beater. The cartoon is pretty amusing, but not nearly as amusing as the fact that Jim’s voice is provided by Dan Castellaneta, who is best known as the voice of Homer Simpson.

POWER QUIZ

EASY

Bill Murray, Dan Aykroyd, Harold Ramis, and Ernie Hudson lent their voices to which video game?

AVERAGE

In which movie-based NES game did the player attempt to stop a killer by controlling one of six camp counselors?

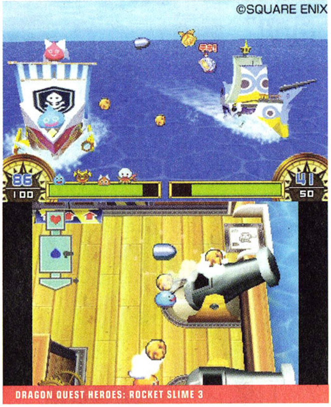
GEORGE
CHILDREN 15

HARDCORE

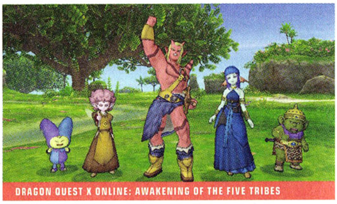
What Game Boy Advance game based on an Antonio Banderas movie was released roughly a year before the film hit theaters?

ANSWERS

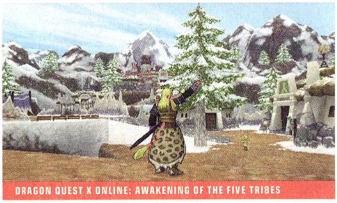
EASY: Ghostbusters: The Video Game; AVERAGE: Friday the 13th; HARDCORE: Ecks vs. Sever



DRAGON QUEST HEROES: ROCKET SLIME 3



DRAGON QUEST X ONLINE: AWAKENING OF THE FIVE TRIBES



DRAGON QUEST X ONLINE: AWAKENING OF THE FIVE TRIBES

The Dragon's Hoard

NEWS *from* **JAPAN**

New **Dragon Quest X** details, a **Rocket Slime** release date, and a surprise TGS announcement cap a big month for Japanese DQ fans.

AFTER INITIALLY teasing the title in 2008, Square Enix took its sweet time lifting the veil on Dragon Quest X Online: Awakening of the Five Tribes. But now the company is wasting no time filling in the details of the premier MMORPG for Wii and Wii U. For the first time in the DQ series's history, players will be asked to select their hero's race from among the game's titular five tribes; the options include hearty, passionate ogres; spritelike Pukuripo; aquatic, music-loving Wedies; wise woodland elves; and clever, haughty dwarves. You'll notice that human beings are not on the menu—at least, not at first. That's because the world's human-populated continent has been sealed away by the game's villain, and it is up to the other races to liberate it.

While the shift to a persistent online world is a big one, Dragon Quest veterans shouldn't have trouble adapting to the game's systems, which are mostly carried over from Dragon Quest IX. Players will once again choose from core occupations such as warrior, mage, and minstrel, and will earn skill points from leveling up. Those skill points can be applied to the chosen character class's unique weapon, spell, and skill proficiencies. Players will be free to change jobs at shrines found in any of the game's cities.

In other Dragon Quest news, Square Enix has announced a November 2 release date for Dragon Quest Heroes: Rocket Slime 3 on N3DS in Japan, and offered a playable demo of the title at September's Tokyo Game Show. The mechanics of the single-player mode seem nearly identical to those of Dragon Quest Heroes: Rocket Slime on Nintendo DS, but the game now features 3D environments and employs aquatic ship-vs.-ship battles in place of the tank-vs.-tank combat in the previous title. A new multiplayer mode allows for two-on-two ship combat or even co-op battles in which up to four players battle computer opponents.

If that's still not enough Dragon Quest for you, fear not: series creator Yuji Horii announced another new N3DS title at a TGS stage show—Dragon Quest Monsters: Terry's Wonderland 3D. This is a remake of the first Dragon Quest Monsters game (released in the US as Dragon Warrior Monsters for the GameBoy Color), starring Terry from Dragon Quest VI fame. The new version will follow the same basic plot as the original, but with an embellished story and an up-to-date monster roster that includes all of the franchise's current monsters and several new ones. **—CASEY L.**

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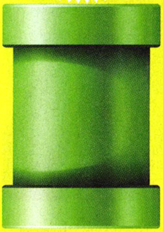
DRAGON QUEST HEROES: ROCKET SLIME 3

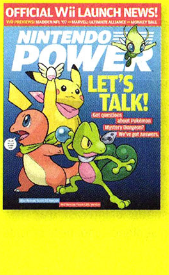
WARP ZONE

What we were writing about way back when

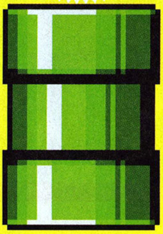
5 YEARS AGO

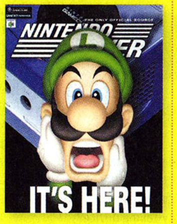


Nintendo Power Vol. 209 had a little bit of everything—including breaking news about the launch of the Wii console, a lead story on Pokémon Mystery Dungeon, and coverage of some of gaming's biggest stars, such as Link, Fox McCloud, Sonic the Hedgehog, Lara Croft, Yoshi, and the heroes of both the Marvel and DC universes. Loads of RPGs? Check. Celebrity interviews? Check. Hands-on with the latest third-party Wii games? Check. Yep, this issue was loaded.


OFFICIAL Wii LAUNCH NEWS!
NINTENDO POWER
LET'S TALK!
Got questions about Pokémon Mystery Dungeon? We've got answers.

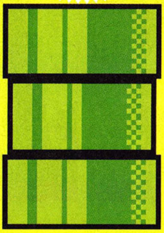
10 YEARS AGO



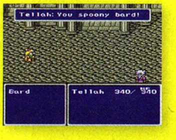

THE ONLY OFFICIAL SOURCE
NINTENDO POWER
IT'S HERE!

Luigi's terrified mug adorned the cover of the 150th issue of Nintendo Power, but the perpetual second fiddle should have been excited, not scared—after all, Nintendo's latest system, the GameCube, had finally arrived! The issue included hefty coverage of Luigi's Mansion and other GCN games, such as Super Monkey Ball, Wave Race: Blue Storm, and Super Smash Bros. Melee, while a six-page retrospective feature helped celebrate the magazine's big sesquicentennial.

20 YEARS AGO



Final Fantasy II (aka Final Fantasy IV), the first full-fledged fantasy epic for the Super NES, earned itself the cover spot of Nintendo Power's November 1991 issue. The game received 10 pages of coverage—complete with a screenshot of the "spoony bard" moment. Many of the other games featured in the issue were forgettable (Ultimate Air Combat, anyone?), but there were a few gems, most notably Kid Icarus: Of Myths and Monsters for Game Boy.



Tellah: You spoony bard!

Bard
Tellah 340/ 340

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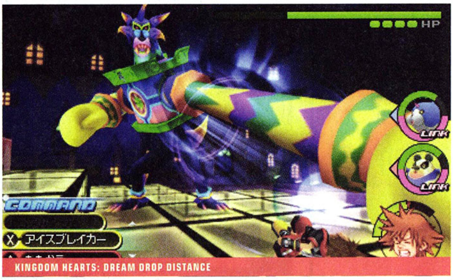
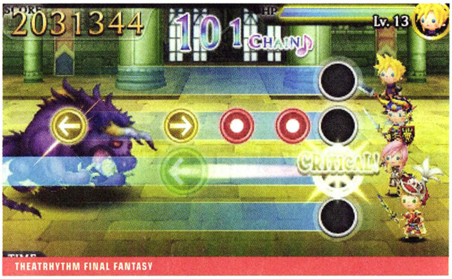
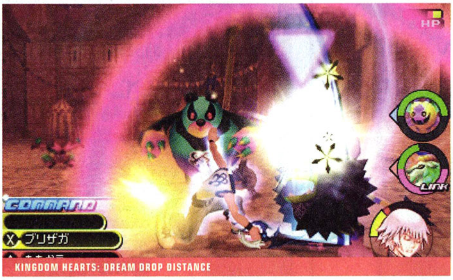


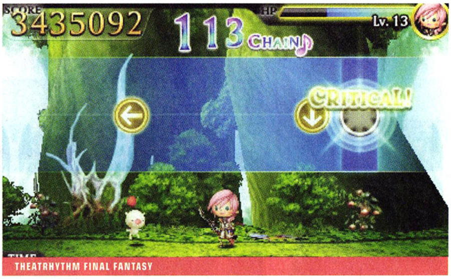
KINGDOM HEARTS: DREAM DROP DISTANCE



THEATRHYTHM FINAL FANTASY



KINGDOM HEARTS: DREAM DROP DISTANCE



THEATRHYTHM FINAL FANTASY

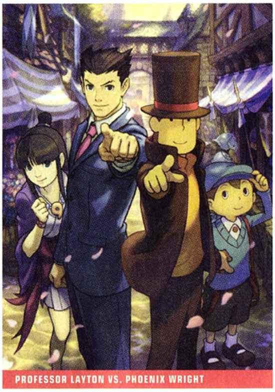
Stealing the Show

NEWS *from* JAPAN

Third-party N3DS titles made a splash at this year's Tokyo Game Show.

AFTER NINTENDO dropped the Monster Hunter bomb at a conference of its own (see page 14), the company elected not to attend the 2011 Tokyo Game Show. But its third-party partners did, offering playable versions of both unannounced and long-awaited Nintendo 3DS titles to the 220,000-plus game fans in attendance.

Square Enix's Bravely Default: Flying Fairy is a strong contender for both the "most impressive debut" and "worst title ever" awards. The game seems to have been designed by the Final Fantasy: The 4 Heroes of Light team, as it shares the game's striking visual design and most of its mechanics. But while that game focused on a retro feel, BD:FF is bravely flying toward the future. In a promotional trailer, Square Enix compared the game to the launch of the Dragon Quest and Final Fantasy series in terms of its significance to the company. It's hard to tell much about the game from its brief TGS demo (other than the fact that it's a fairly conventional Japanese RPG with stunning graphics), but that demo did make an impact by having a member of the game's cast pop up from an AR Card to beg the player to help save her crumbling world. AR Cards as a story-telling device? There's certainly nothing conventional about that.

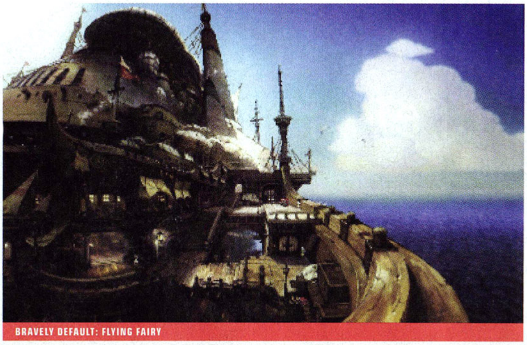


PROFESSOR LAYTON VS. PHOENIX WRIGHT

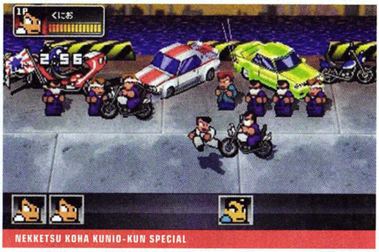
If you needed more evidence that Square Enix is letting a madman with poor English skills title its software lineup, I direct you to Theatrhythm Final Fantasy. TFF is essentially a music game, in which you tap objects with your stylus to the rhythm of Final Fantasy music. Each scenario roughly—*very* roughly—follows the plot of a Final Fantasy game, beginning with a field segment in which your rhythmic tappings merely help the heroes walk toward a goal (perhaps picking up a Chocobo along the way), followed by a traditional Final Fantasy-style battle in which the taps make each of the characters attack and cast spells against a foe. The third and final part of each stage re-creates a memorable event scene, such as FFVIII's prerendered CG dance sequence. The game will include levels based on each of the first 13 Final Fantasy games, so that's 39 classic Final Fantasy songs in all.

The unlikely winner of the "most coherent Square Enix N3DS game title" award is Kingdom Hearts 3D: Dream Drop Distance, which is finally in playable form. The demo features two areas, one for each of the game's heroes. Sora begins in Traverse Town, where he soon meets Neku, the hero of DS cult-favorite The World Ends With You. Neku didn't stick around for long, but his existence as a character suggests that Shibuya may be one of the game's many new worlds. The demo for Riku, the other hero, takes place in a world based on Disney's *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*, the first of several new settings based on Disney properties that haven't yet been tapped by the Kingdom Hearts team.

While Square Enix probably had the most titles of interest to a Western audience, Japanese crowds

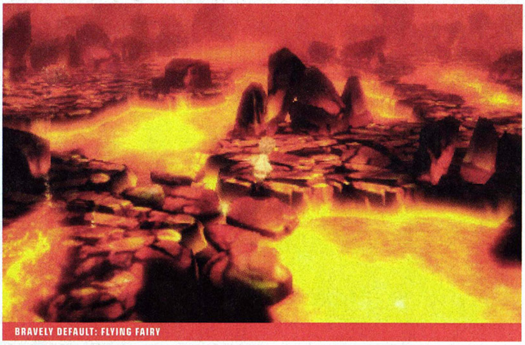


BRAVELY DEFAULT: FLYING FAIRY

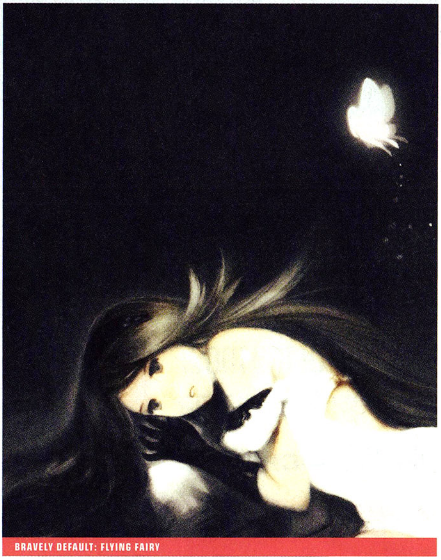


NEKKETSU KOHA KUNIO-KUN SPECIAL

NEW LOVE PLUS



BRAVELY DEFAULT: FLYING FAIRY

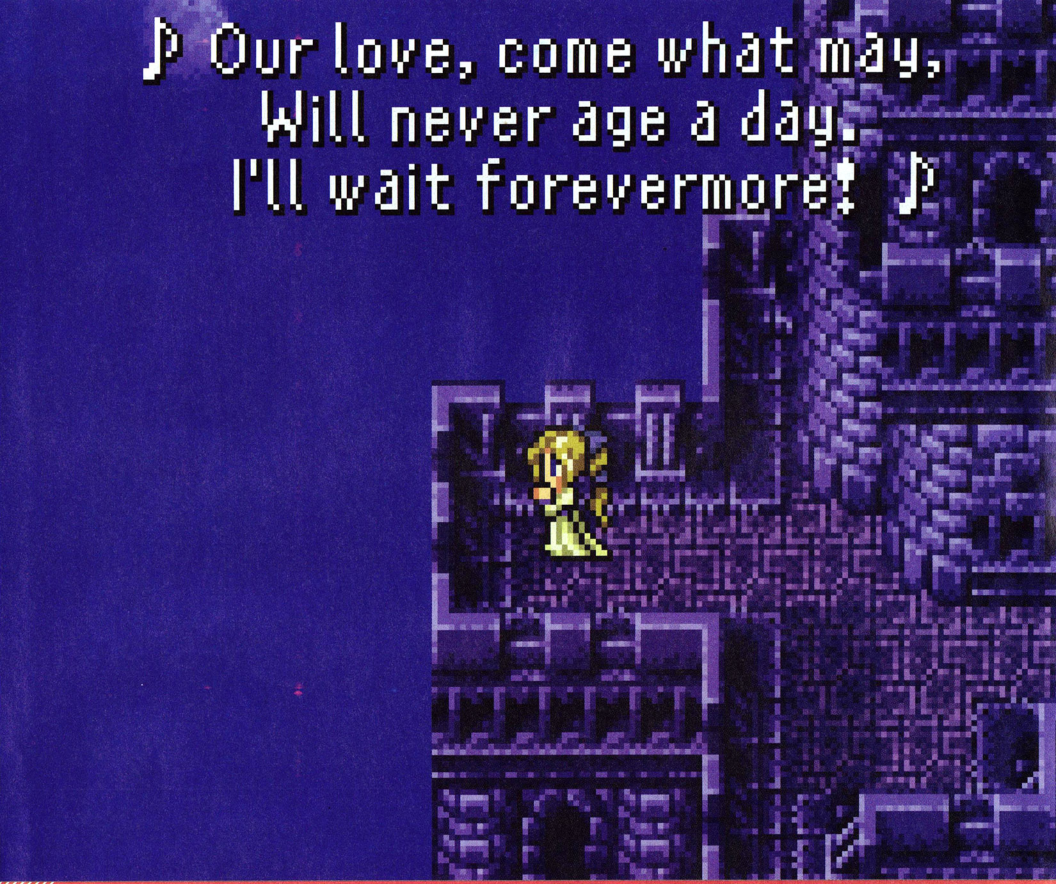


BRAVELY DEFAULT: FLYING FAIRY

flocked to Konami's booth as well, mostly to play a game titled New Love Plus. Konami's Love Plus series is virtually unknown in the West; however, each new installment of this popular dating sim is a huge deal in Japan, and the December release of New Love Plus is expected to be a major driver of N3DS sales. In the game, players choose one of three girls and have a virtual relationship with them, taking them on dates, visiting them at work, cheering them up when they're depressed, and so on. New features of the N3DS version include gyro controls that allow you to see your virtual girlfriend from different angles by moving your system around, and multiple ways to use the handheld's rear- and forward-facing cameras to make the relationship feel more real. For example, if you point your N3DS at a real-world couch, the upper screen will show your digital, polygonal girlfriend approaching the couch and sitting down on it. The game also uses the forward-pointing camera to recognize the user's face, and the girls will respond affectionately only to that person. Like all the new features in New Love Plus, it's every bit as cool as it is creepy.

Like Nintendo, Professor Layton developer Level-5 didn't attend TGS, but the company's upcoming Professor Layton vs. Phoenix Wright did make an appearance at a Capcom stage show. The bizarre collaboration pits Level-5's Layton against Capcom's Phoenix Wright at a medieval witch trial. The game footage reveals that for the first time in either series, the Phoenix Wright-inspired courtroom-action scenes have been modeled entirely in polygonal 3D.

Finally, gamers who have been playing since the 8-bit era may be interested in Arc System Works's surprise N3DS revival of Technos's Kunio-kun franchise. This series of more than 30 fighting and sports games has been localized under a variety of different titles in the West, and includes the beloved NES classic River City Ransom. Arc System Works has licensed the series and hired its original creator, Yoshihisa Kishimoto, to oversee the revival, titled Nekketsu Koha Kunio-kun Special. The game card includes a remake of the original beat-'em-up arcade title (known as Renegade in North America), a new story mode that adds some River City Ransom-esque RPG elements, a two-player co-op mission mode, and a four-player battle royale. The game's visual style recalls the NES era, with simple 2D sprites popping out of 3D environments. **—CASEY L.**



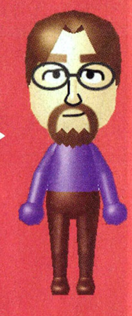
♪ Our love, come what may,
Will never age a day.
I'll wait forevermore! ♪

THAT WAS
AWESOME!
OUR FAVORITE VIDEO
GAME MOMENTS

THE OPERA SCENE

FINAL FANTASY VI ADVANCE, GAME BOY ADVANCE, 2007 (originally from FINAL FANTASY III, SUPER NES, 1994)

"An opera scene? In the middle of an RPG? With lyrics and everything? It sounds crazy, but it made for one of the most heartfelt moments of any game we've ever played." —**CHRIS H.**



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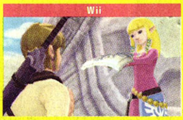
Wii



1. The Legend of Zelda: Skyward Sword
2. Mario Party 9
3. Rhythm Heaven
4. LEGO Harry Potter: Years 5-7
5. Fortune Street

NINTENDO DS

1. Shin Megami Tensei: Devil Survivor 2
2. LEGO Harry Potter: Years 5-7
3. Bejeweled 3
4. Ghostwire: Link to the Paranormal
5. Beyblade Metal Masters

NINTENDO 3DS

1. Mario Kart 7
2. Paper Mario*
3. Luigi's Mansion 2
4. Kid Icarus: Uprising
5. Sonic Generations

Wii

The Adventures of Tintin: The Game	Ubisoft	12/11
Alvin and the Chipmunks: Chipwrecked	Majesco	12/11
Cartoon Network Punch Time Explosion XL	Crave	HOL 11
DreamWorks Super Star Kartz	Activision	11/11
Fortune Street	Nintendo	12/11
Jaws: Ultimate Predator	Majesco	11/11
The Legend of Zelda: Skyward Sword	Nintendo	11/11
LEGO Harry Potter: Years 5-7	Warner Bros.	11/11
Mario Party 9	Nintendo	TBA
Marvel Super Hero Squad: Comic Combat	THQ	11/11
Need for Speed: The Run	Electronic Arts	11/11
Power Rangers Samurai	Namco Bandai	11/11
The Price is Right Decades	Ubisoft	11/11
Rhythm Heaven	Nintendo	TBA
WWE '12	THQ	11/11
Zumba Fitness 2	Majesco	11/11

Wii U

Aliens: Colonial Marines	Sega	TBA
Batman: Arkham City	Warner Bros.	TBA
Battlefield 3	Electronic Arts	TBA
Darksiders II	THQ	TBA
Killer Freaks from Outer Space	Ubisoft	TBA
LEGO City Stories	Nintendo	TBA
Metro: Last Light	THQ	TBA
Ninja Gaiden III: Razor's Edge	Tecmo Koei	TBA
Pikmin*	Nintendo	TBA
Super Smash Bros.*	Nintendo	TBA
Tekken*	Namco Bandai	TBA
Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon Online	Ubisoft	TBA

NINTENDO DS

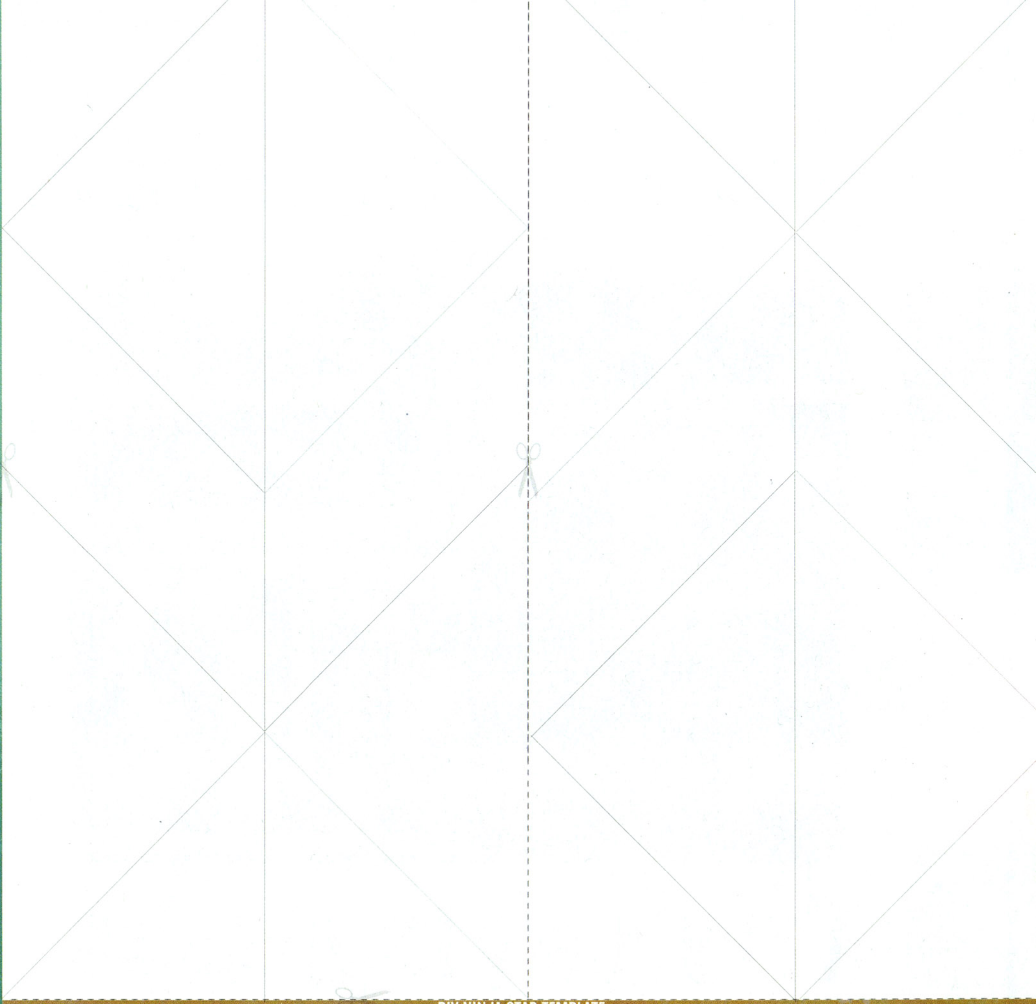
Bejeweled 3	PopCap	HOL 11
Beyblade Metal Masters	Konami	11/11
DaGeDar	GameMill	HOL 11
DreamWorks Super Star Kartz	Activision	11/11
Ghostwire: Link to the Paranormal	TBA	TBA
LEGO Harry Potter: Years 5-7	Warner Bros.	11/11
Pirate Battle	Orbital Media	TBA
Power Rangers Samurai	Namco Bandai	11/11
Shin Megami Tensei: Devil Survivor 2	Atlus	2/12
Squinkies 2: Adventure Mall Surprize!	Activision	HOL 11
Victorious: Hollywood Arts Debut	D3	HOL 11

NINTENDO 3DS

The Adventures of Tintin: The Game	Ubisoft	12/11
Lovely Lisa 3D	Tomy	TBA
Luigi's Mansion 2	Nintendo	2012
Mahjong Cub3D	Atlus	TBA
Mario & Sonic at the London 2012 Olympic Games	Sega	2/12
Mario Kart 7	Nintendo	12/11
Martha Stewart	Majesco	TBA
Metal Gear Solid: Snake Eater 3D	Konami	2012

Animal Crossing*	Nintendo	TBA
BloodRayne: The Shroud	Majesco	TBA
A Boy and His Blob	Majesco	TBA
Brunswick Pro Bowling	Crave	TBA
Carnival Games Wild West 3D	Take-Two	TBA
Chocobo Racing 3D*	Square Enix	TBA
Contra*	Konami	TBA
Crash-City GP	Rocket	TBA
Crush 3D	Sega	2/12
de Blob 2	THQ	TBA
Dragon Ball*	Namco Bandai	TBA
Dragon Quest*	Square Enix	TBA
DreamWorks Super Star Kartz	Activision	11/11
Dynasty Warriors*	Tecmo Koei	TBA
Etrian Odyssey*	Atlus	TBA
Farm*	Ubisoft	11/11
Final Fantasy*	Square Enix	TBA
Fractured Soul 3D	Ignition	2012
Gundam*	Namco Bandai	TBA
Heroes of Ruin	Square Enix	2012
Jaws: Ultimate Predator	Majesco	11/11
Kid Icarus: Uprising	Nintendo	TBA
Kingdom Hearts: Dream Drop Distance	Square Enix	TBA
LEGO City Stories	Nintendo	2012
LEGO Harry Potter: Years 5-7	Warner Bros.	11/11
Lion's Pride: Adventures in the Serengeti	Majesco	TBA
Naruto Shippuden Action*	Tomy	TBA
NCIS*	Ubisoft	3/12
Need for Speed: The Run	Electronic Arts	11/11
Ninja Gaiden*	Tecmo Koei	TBA
Paper Mario*	Nintendo	TBA
Planet Crashers 3D	Ignition	2012
Professor Layton and the Mask of Miracle*	Level-5	TBA
Rayman Origins	Ubisoft	3/12
Raving Rabbids 5*	Ubisoft	TBA
Resident Evil: Revelations	Capcom	2012
Rhythm Thief & the Emperor's Treasure	Sega	2012
RollerCoaster Tycoon 3D	Atari	3/12
Shin Megami Tensei: Persona*	Atlus	TBA
Sonic Generations	Sega	11/11
Sudoku Premier Edition	Majesco	TBA
Super Robot*	Namco Bandai	TBA
Super Smash Bros.*	Nintendo	TBA
Tales of the Abyss	Namco Bandai	2/12
Tekken 3D Prime Edition	Namco Bandai	2012
VS-robo	Rocket	TBA
WonderWorld Amusement Park	Majesco	TBA
WWE All Stars	THQ	11/11
Zoo Resort	Ubisoft	10/11

RED TEXT = GAMES ADDED THIS MONTH. * TENTATIVE TITLE **NOTE:** RELEASE DATES OFTEN CHANGE. ALL NINTENDO 3DS SCREENSHOTS HAVE BEEN CAPTURED IN 2D MODE.



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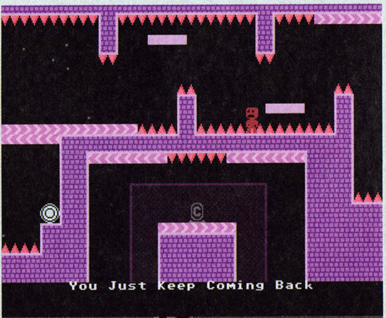
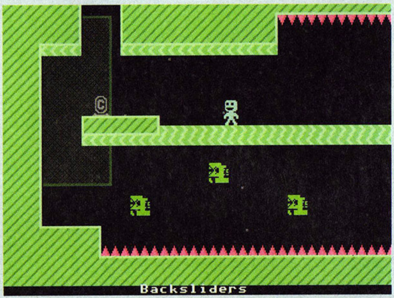
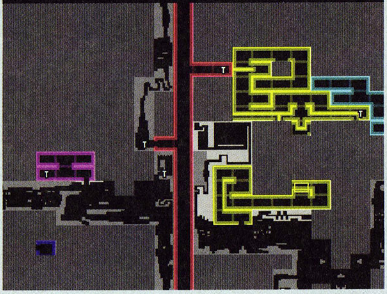
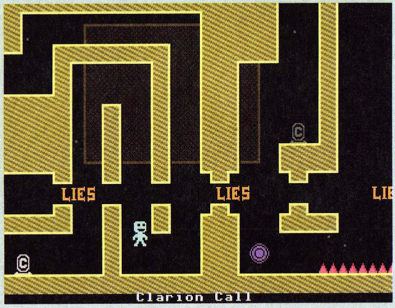






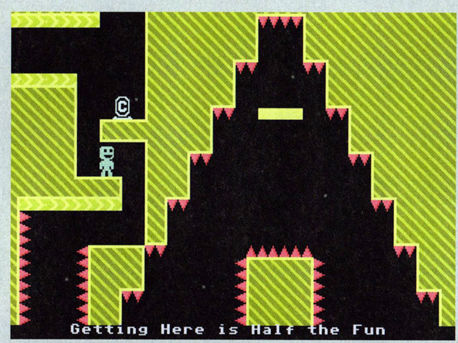


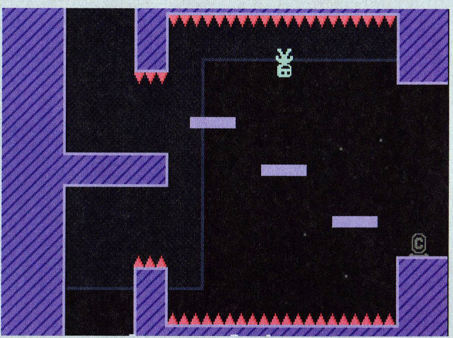
Vvvvvvvery Impressive

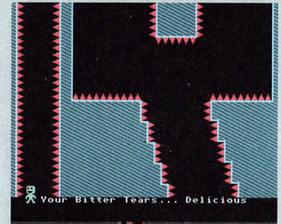
The indie PC hit VVVVVV makes its way to the Nintendo eShop.

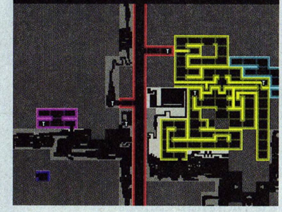
UPON STARTING VVVVVV, younger gamers might be confused by the initial blue screen that is surrounded by a flashing, multicolored frame. Those who grew up during the '80s, however, will feel a twinge of nostalgia as memories of waiting for a Commodore 64 game to load come flooding back. After this brief intro, the game shifts to its minimalist title screen, a black void that contains nothing but the six letters that comprise the title, and a notice to "[Press any Button]." It's a simple start for what—at first—seems to be a simple game. The retro influence extends beyond the startup sequence. The old-school computer graphics provide a healthy amount of charm. Enhancing the atmosphere is the excellent soundtrack composed by Swedish chiptune artist Magnus Pålsson (aka SoulEye).

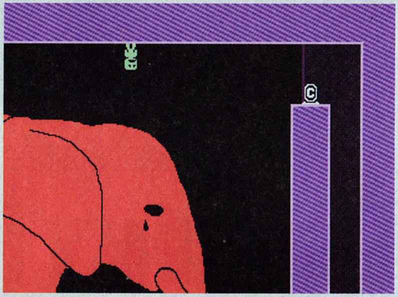
As the game begins, you take control of Captain Viridian, the commander of a ship that has crashed due to a dimensional anomaly. In the chaos, five members of your crew have been teleported to various points throughout a strange new world. Your goal, of course, is to rescue everyone. Aiding in this effort is Viridian's ability to manipulate gravity. Tapping a button causes gravity to flip, sending Viridian up to the ceiling and vice versa. The trick is, gravity can be changed only when Viridian is standing on a solid surface. The game's creator, Terry Cavanagh, explained this mechanic as follows: "Gravity flipping in and of itself isn't that interesting; a lot of games have implemented gravity-flipping mechanics. What I think makes VVVVVV interesting is its singular focus on this concept; that gravity-flipping is the core idea everything else is designed around. Having a midair gravity-flip ability basically just turns into a high-jump mechanic, which











[Above] When you play VVVVVV you will surely ask yourself, "What's the deal with the giant, crying elephant?"

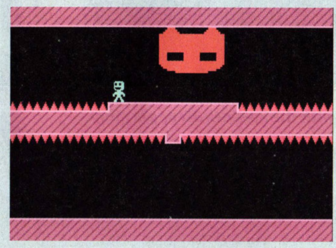
isn't as interesting to explore." Luckily, there is plenty to explore here, with seemingly endless rooms littered with hazards, all of which will destroy Viridian with a touch.

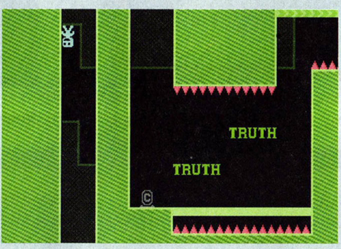
The protagonist's fragile nature is bound to aggravate some players, but in actuality it's one of the title's main draws. This is one of the more challenging games in recent memory, but ample checkpoints keep the difficulty balanced in such a way that it provides incentive to continue onward. When asked about potentially frustrating players, Cavanagh told us, "The game is challenging, but it's designed not to be frustrating. Even if you find you're dying over and over again, the game instantly puts you back where you last were. The game never makes you replay challenges you've already beaten, never punishes you unfairly. That's a principle that was very important to me when making this."

The world of VVVVVV is composed of multiple smaller dungeons connected by a sprawling overworld. Keep an eye on the map on the system's lower screen, as it will come in extremely handy while you explore. Viridian is free to move around the world and rescue the missing crewmates in any order. This level of freedom is something that Cavanagh built into the game for the players' benefit. As he points out, "There are some basic elements (spikes, enemies, checkpoints) which are present everywhere in the game, and then there other elements which are only present in particular levels. Every new element you encounter allows for a variety of interesting challenges—for example, the Space Station stage has moving platforms that you can stand on both sides of. Because of the structure of the game, it doesn't really matter what order you encounter the levels in—they're all self-contained."

In addition to the crewmates, there are hidden Trinkets to collect. Recovering these prizes, however, is extremely challenging. To make it worth the effort, they unlock both songs from the soundtrack, and levels to play in a Time Trial mode. You can also unlock a mode that flips the layout of the world, as well as the unspeakably dangerous No Death mode (where one death results in a game-over). To put that into perspective, in about three hours of playing, we died roughly 800 times.

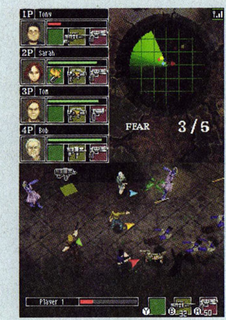
VVVVVV may have originated on PCs, but the game's producer, Tyrone Rodriguez of publisher Nicalis, is very excited about taking advantage of the Nintendo 3DS system's unique 3D capabilities. He elaborates, "We've spent a lot of time tuning and playing with the depth. The goal is to heighten the experience and look of the game without getting in the way of gameplay." He also teases, "We do have plans to use other N3DS-specific features, like player-created level sharing, but I'm probably not supposed to say anything yet. Oops, I said it." That's OK, Tyrone. We'll forgive you for slipping this time. Meanwhile, we have yet another reason to look forward to VVVVVV when it releases later this year. **—PHIL T.**





A Storm's A-Brewin'

Go Series Undead Storm is rising on DSiWare.



FOR THE LAST YEAR the Go Series franchise has provided DSiWare players with a variety of titles from several Japanese developers. Next up? Go Series Undead Storm, a promising zombie shooter that might prove to be the best of the bunch.

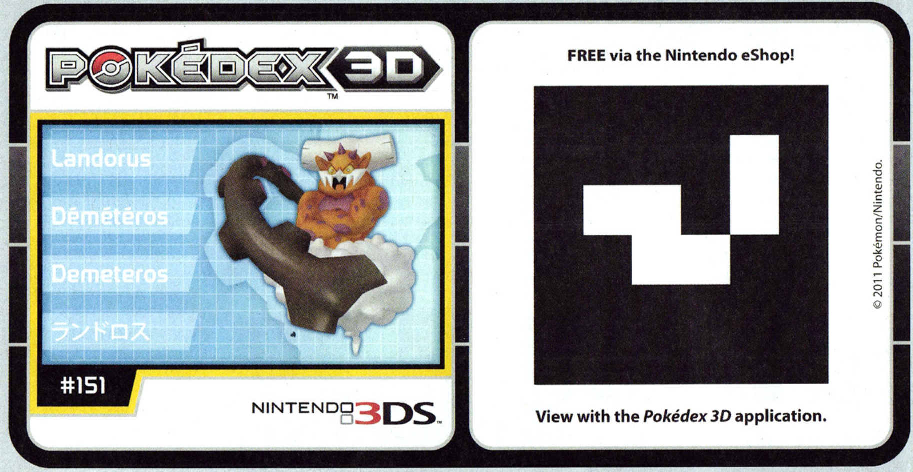
Undead Storm begins, like so many undead apocalypses have, with a meteorite strike. As you'd expect, this kick-starts the zombie circle of life, and that's where players step in. Gameplay will be run-and-gun shooter fare, with players blasting in all directions as hordes made up of distinct zombie types—including run-of-the-mill citizens, poisonous varieties, and plague dogs—encroach.

Four playable characters, each with unique backstories, will be offered—Max, an ex-detective; Master, a enigmatic old man; Jenna, a TV reporter after a scoop; and Darren, a junk-food-loving college student. Multifaceted loadouts consisting of a stock revolver, a main weapon, a subweapon, and healing items should keep the shooting interesting, and various ordnance designed to annihilate swaths of shambling buggers (or bosses) round out your tool kit.

The action will span three stages—Fright Factory, Horror Hospital, and Carnage Crossroads—and three difficulty levels. Up to four players can unite (or wage war on each other) using the DS system's local wireless communication, and some of the game's Survival Records (rewards for fulfilling certain conditions during play) will require teamwork. Look for this one sometime late this year. **—PATRICK C.**

Land a Legendary Pokémon

Add the prized Pokémon Landorus to your Pokédex 3D with this Pokémon AR Marker!



FREE via the Nintendo eShop!

View with the *Pokédex 3D* application.

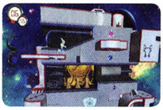
© 2011 Pokémon/Nintendo.

WE CONTINUE our series of Pokémon AR Markers with one for the beloved crop-growing Pokémon known as "The Guardian of the Fields." As with our previous Pokémon offerings, you can receive Landorus over SpotPass only after you have scanned its Pokémon AR Marker (unless you are lucky enough to know someone who has it already and is willing to share). Landorus completes the set of three sky-surfing Pokémon; we hope you get them all! **—CHRIS S.**

EVALUATION STATION

Wii DOWNLOAD
NINTENDO DSi DOWNLOAD
NINTENDO 3DS DOWNLOAD

WiiWARE



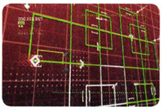
AYA AND THE CUBES OF LIGHT

PUBLISHER: OBJECT VISION
GENRE: PUZZLE
PRICE: 1,000 POINTS

In Aya and the Cubes of Light, players guide the titular character as she platforms her way around the outside of a rotating cube, collecting spheres on her way to unlocking said cube (and moving on to more-complex cubes). The puzzle aspect is provided by gravity; up, down, left, and right shift constantly as players navigate to their goals. Unfortunately, the gravitational intrigue is severely marred by controls that frustrate with gusto. **—PATRICK C.**

Hmmm...

WiiWARE



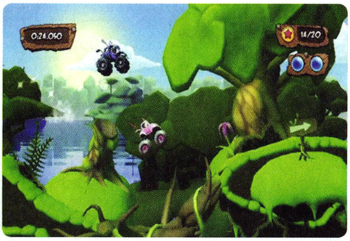
ESCAPEVEKTOR: CHAPTER 1

PUBLISHER: NNOOO
GENRE: ACTION
PRICE: 500 POINTS

escapeVektor: Chapter 1 is slightly reminiscent of Pac-Man, though instead of gobbling dots in a maze, your goal is to guide Vektor over lines in a computer program to change their color. The CPU "adapts" to your progress by adding various enemies and traps to avoid; fortunately, Vektor is able to snag aids such as speed boosts and detonators. Losing all your progress in a stage due to one error can be frustrating, but unlimited tries ease that pain. **—DAVID O.**

Recommended

WiiWARE



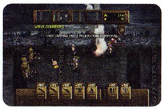
MOTOHEROZ

PUBLISHER: REDLYNX **GENRE:** RACING **PRICE:** 1,500 POINTS

Don't be put off by MotoHeroz's price. Sure, it's more expensive than most WiiWare games, but for 1,500 points you get a lot of quality and a lot of fun content. Though MotoHeroz is ostensibly a racing game, it's more like a vehicle-based platformer in single-player mode, as you must use skill and strategy to outwit very challenging CPU foes. In multiplayer mode, meanwhile, the game becomes pure chaos—in a good way. It often seems like luck as much as anything determines who places first, but laughs, surprise upsets, and by-the-skin-of-your-teeth victories are guaranteed. The game also looks fantastic, with characters reminiscent of the Canadians from *South Park*—the art style works perfectly for WiiWare. **—CHRIS H.**

Recommended

WiiWARE



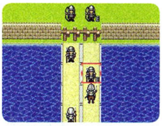
TRENCHES GENERALS

PUBLISHER: FISHING CACTUS
GENRE: STRATEGY
PRICE: 700 POINTS

Offering an intriguing alternative to strategists burnt out on tower defense, Trenches Generals invites players to engage in side-scrolling trench warfare. You'll purchase units—riflemen, snipers, and machine gunners, for example—then bolster your trenches (using engineers) while advancing on enemy positions. Action-driven gameplay coupled with RPG-lite elements offer the potential for great fun, but the grandeur is limited by wonky controls and repetitive battlefields. **—PATRICK C.**

Hmmm...

DSiWARE



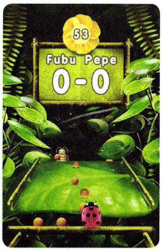
BREAK TACTICS

PUBLISHER: AGETEC
GENRE: STRATEGY
PRICE: 500 POINTS/$4.99

Though its turn-based strategy offers adequate depth—upgradeable unit types play rock-paper-scissors on terrain tiles that impact combat effectiveness—Break Tactics can only be described as excruciatingly dated. From the mid-'80s graphic presentation to the exhaustingly slow pace (due to overly restrictive movement allowances), this one simply doesn't compete in a genre that more-capable developers have littered with gems. **—PATRICK C.**

Grumble Grumble

DSiWARE



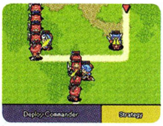
BUGS 'N' BALLS

PUBLISHER: ENJOYUP GAMES
GENRE: SPORTS
PRICE: 200 POINTS/$1.99

The objective of Bugs 'N' Balls is simply to move your bug so you can throw balls into a goal while dodging projectiles and keeping your opponent from doing the same. It might be fun if not for the lopsided difficulty; the first league is far too easy and the second is quite frustrating. **—DAVID O.**

Grumble Grumble

DSiWARE



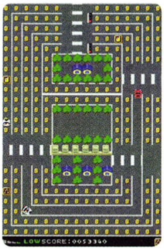
DEFENSE OF THE MIDDLE KINGDOM

PUBLISHER: AKSYS GAMES
GENRE: STRATEGY
PRICE: 500 POINTS/$4.99

Blending tower defense with old-school, Japanese-style strategy gaming, Defense of the Middle Kingdom adds obscure history (Chinese) and complexity to the tower-defense formula. Players place commanders (rather than towers) and deploy "strategies" from a palette of traps and fighting styles to bolster their chances. Unfortunately, the formula tweaks mostly add dryness to an otherwise monotonous tower-defense entry. **—PATRICK C.**

Hmmm...

DSiWARE



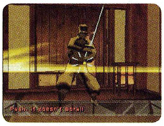
DOTMAN

PUBLISHER: AGETEC
GENRE: ACTION
PRICE: 800 POINTS/$7.99

To old fogeys, DotMan is an updated version of Atari's Dodge 'Em. To everyone else, it's a Pac-Manish maze game. Power-up items and a decent variety of car maneuvers make the game more exciting, but the action can't help but grow repetitive after a few stages. A two-player mode would have helped. **—PHIL T.**

Hmmm...

DSiWARE



ESCAPE TRICK: NINJA CASTLE

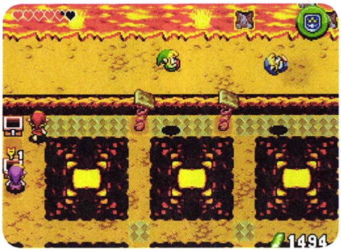
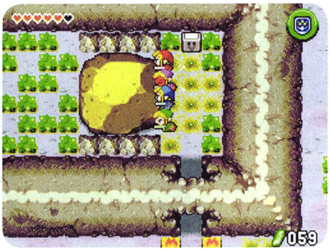
PUBLISHER: INTENSE
GENRE: ADVENTURE
PRICE: 500 POINTS/$4.99

Seeking exciting ninja action? You'll have to look elsewhere. Escape Trick: Ninja Castle is methodically paced and full of obtuse puzzles, and though this made sense in the game's predecessor (Escape Trick: The Secret of Rock City Prison), such elements feel out of place when you're meant to be a highly skilled ninja. There are fight scenes and opportunities to use ninja magic, but this brain-bending adventure is still a bit on the dull side. **—CHRIS H.**

Hmmm...

EVALUATION STATION

DSiWARE

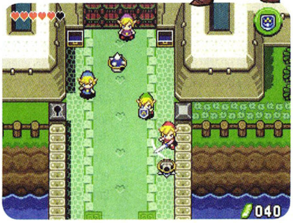



THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: FOUR SWORDS ANNIVERSARY EDITION

PUBLISHER: NINTENDO **GENRE:** ADVENTURE **PRICE:** FREE! (UNTIL 2/20/12)

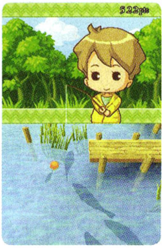
Chris H.'s Pick

When I first heard about The Legend of Zelda: Four Swords coming to DSiWare and the Nintendo eShop as part of Zelda's 25th-anniversary celebration, I was a bit skeptical. Sure, it was a stellar multiplayer game when it was released on the same cartridge as A Link to the Past on Game Boy Advance, but surely the Zelda series warrants something more than a port of a nine-year-old bonus mode. Well, leave it to Nintendo—The Legend of Zelda: Four Swords Anniversary Edition is much more than that. Not only is it still one of the best multiplayer experiences available (it features the traditional tools and puzzles that make the series so beloved, and the cooperative/competitive dynamic is excellent), but this version features a single-player mode that the original lacked. Better yet, the game contains new dungeons, including stages that use the environments and graphics from past Zelda games—even the NES original. And to top it off, the download is completely free until February 20, 2012. Now that's what I call an anniversary present.



Recommended

DSiWARE



GO SERIES FISHING RESORT

PUBLISHER: GAMEBRIDGE
GENRE: SPORTS
PRICE: 200 POINTS/$1.99

Fishing Resort pares down the typical fishing video game to its bare essentials. What's left is a simplistic yet exhilarating game. Sure, the "hook a fish, tire it out, reel it in, and net it" formula can grow repetitive, but in short bursts it's a blast. The added Challenge mode helps. —**PHIL T.**

Recommended

DSiWARE

Anorexia
Arthritis
Arrhythmia
Angina

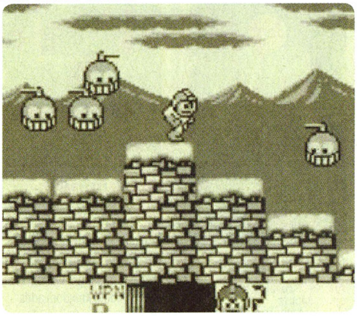
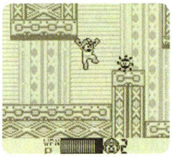
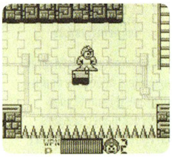
HOUSE MD EPISODE 2: BLUE MEANIE

PUBLISHER: LEGACY INTERACTIVE
GENRE: ADVENTURE
PRICE: 800 POINTS/$7.99

Not surprisingly, this second episode of the House game plays exactly like its predecessor. That means some mildly amusing (if not always true-to-character) dialogue, horrible touch-screen controls, and plenty of boring minigames. You're not even punished for poor performance, making it so you can complete the whole thing in one short sitting. Definitely not worth the inflated price. —**PHIL T.**

Grumble Grumble

N3DS VIRTUAL CONSOLE

MEGA MAN: DR. WILY'S REVENGE

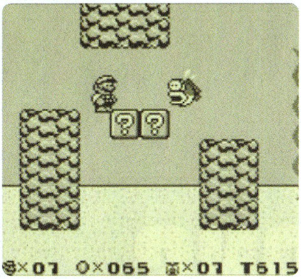
PLATFORM: GAME BOY **ORIGINALLY RELEASED:** 1991 **PUBLISHER:** CAPCOM **GENRE:** ACTION **PRICE:** $3.99

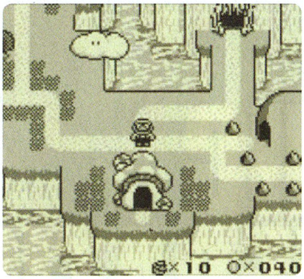
Chris H.'s Pick

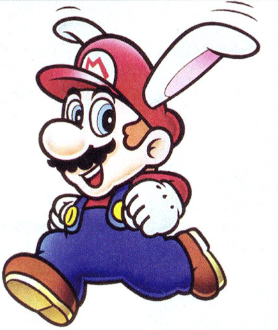
This game was a beast when it came out many years ago. Not only was it incredibly tough, but the difficulty was compounded by the blurry screen of the original Game Boy. The Virtual Console version not only alleviates the graphical issues, but eases up the challenge (due to the fact that you can save the game anywhere, if you so choose). Difficulty aside, Mega Man: Dr. Wily's Revenge has always been an excellent handheld interpretation of the classic action series. The control isn't as crisp as that of the NES titles, nor is the game as long, but it features fantastic gameplay and great level design.

Recommended

N3DS VIRTUAL CONSOLE







SUPER MARIO LAND 2: 6 GOLDEN COINS

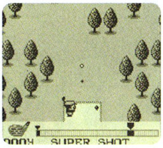
PLATFORM: GAME BOY **ORIGINALLY RELEASED:** 1992 **PUBLISHER:** NINTENDO **GENRE:** PLATFORMER **PRICE:** $5.99

Phil T.'s Pick

The original Super Mario Land was a good game, but it felt decidedly primitive when compared to Mario's console adventures. With this sequel, Nintendo was able to deliver something closer to the Mario games fans were used to playing on their TVs. Even though it's a fairly early Game Boy title, Super Mario Land 2's graphics are some of the finest on the system. Thanks to a visual style influenced by Super Mario World on the Super NES, Mario and his enemies are large and expressive. Likewise, the game's backgrounds are filled with intricate details that bring the world to life, and these are worlds that you *want* to see come alive. With stages like a land built from LEGO-style blocks, the inner workings of a giant mechanical Mario, and outer space, the varied level design ensures that you won't get bored. There's not much new in the way of power-up items, but the addition of a carrot (which transforms our hero into Rabbit Mario) does lead to some fun platforming moments with the limited hovering capabilities provided by the bunny ears. The only real downside of Super Mario Land 2 is its difficulty. It is neither particularly long nor challenging, so you're likely to plow through the adventure in a day or two. Even so, Super Mario Land 2 is a top-notch platformer and well worth playing.

Recommended

N3DS VIRTUAL CONSOLE



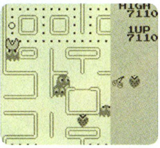
GOLF

PLATFORM: GAME BOY
ORIGINALLY RELEASED: 1990
PUBLISHER: NINTENDO
GENRE: SPORTS
PRICE: $2.99

Some game types haven't gotten better over time; they've simply evolved with technology. Golf games, though, don't fall within this group: older titles tend to feature finicky, oblique controls; courses wholly devoid of eye candy; and an overall experience that—by today's standard—can be described only as crippled. This retro Golf is mostly going to appeal to those seeking a hit of pure nostalgia. —**PATRICK C.**

Hmmm...

N3DS VIRTUAL CONSOLE



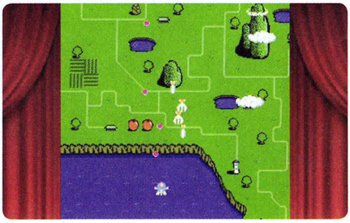
PAC-MAN

PLATFORM: GAME BOY
ORIGINALLY RELEASED: 1990
PUBLISHER: NAMCO BANDAI
GENRE: ACTION
PRICE: $3.99

Namco has gone to great lengths to ensure that a playable version of Pac-Man is available on just about every platform out there. Given that a few ports of the arcade original already exist on various DS and N3DS compilations, this Game Boy version is of little use. It's not a *bad* game, but the lack of color takes away some of its punch, and the scrolling maze makes dodging ghosts trickier than it should be. —**PHIL T.**

Hmmm...

N3DS 3D CLASSICS



3D CLASSICS: TWINBEE

PLATFORM: FAMICOM **ORIGINALLY RELEASED:** 1985
PUBLISHER: KONAMI/NINTENDO **GENRE:** SHOOTER **PRICE:** $4.99

A couple of months ago we recommended the 3D Classics version of Namco's retro arcade title Xevious. We pointed out that the game's dual-layer action (where you shoot targets both in the air and on the ground) made it especially well-suited to a 3D upgrade. Why are we reminding you of this now? Well, mainly because TwinBee is pretty much Xevious with a hefty coating of adorable. It's not just a direct clone, though. TwinBee features a fairly elaborate power-up system that sends multiple bells cascading toward your ship. When shot, the bells cycle between various enhancements and bonus points, leaving it up to the player to carefully activate the desired item while dodging enemy fire. It's a great risk/reward setup that keeps the action frantic. —**PHIL T.**

Recommended

ALSO AVAILABLE

If you want to get in touch with your artistic side, consider WiiWare title **Paint Splash** (500 Points). Up to four players can participate, and you can save your creations to an SD memory card.... A classic card game comes to DSiWare with the simply titled **Bridge** (500 Points/$4.99), which features four-player support and DS Download play.... A couple of new puzzle games have hit DSiWare as well: **Crystal Caverns of Amon-Ra** (500 Points/$4.99), in which you shoot and match colored balls à la Magnetica, and shape- and color-matching game **Puzzle Rocks** (500 Points/$4.99).

PREVIEWS

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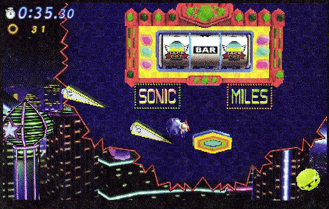
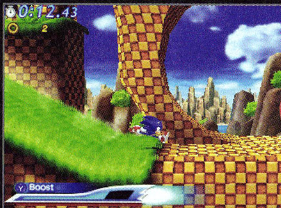
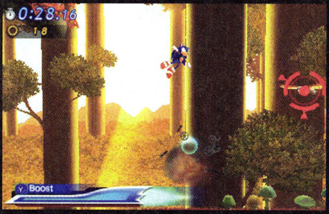
SONIC GENERATIONS

A celebration of all things hedgehog







02
START!
GOAL!

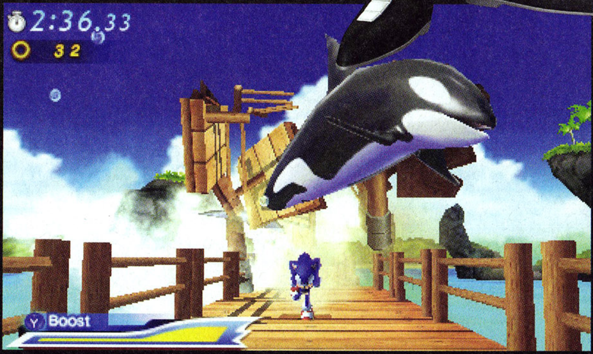
SONIC GENERATIONS IS basically Sega's love letter to all the gamers who have supported Sonic the Hedgehog over the last 20 years. Whether you're a fan of classic pot-bellied Sonic, modern lanky Sonic, or any blue bipedal anthropomorphic critter you come across, you'll find a lot to enjoy in the Blue Blur's latest.

The game begins with you playing as classic Sonic in a familiar locale—the Green Hill Zone from the very first Sonic the Hedgehog game. The level isn't an exact polygonal re-creation of the original, but it's pretty darn close; the lush foliage and checkered dirt patterns are instantly recognizable, and longtime fans will feel right at home with the placement of enemies and passages (not to mention Sonic's physics). Even the catchy music returns. After you complete the level, though, a strange happening occurs: something akin to a black hole appears, and Sonic is, evidently, pulled in. A few cut-scenes later you find yourself playing as modern Sonic, who gets to race through his own modified version of the Green Hill Zone. You can feel the difference between the two Sonics immediately; as modern Sonic you start the stage at a full run and you basically never have to slow down. Whereas classic Sonic is slightly more methodical and platforming-oriented, modern Sonic is almost always on the move. Modern Sonic also has access to a boost maneuver (activated by pressing Y), can use a homing attack to target enemies, and can grind rails; he can't, however, use classic Sonic's trademark spin-dash.

From there you'll embark on a whirlwind tour of levels based on some of the best stages from throughout Sonic's storied career. In the neon-filled Casino Night Zone (originally found in Sonic the Hedgehog 2) you'll ricochet off of bumpers and launch yourself with flippers and plungers as you bounce through a pinball-inspired environment. Keeping with the casino theme, you'll have chances to earn rings via slot machines and Robotnik-themed roulette tables. Next up is the Mushroom Hill Zone (from Sonic & Knuckles), where you'll spring off massive fungi, run across unfurling vines to avoid hazards, grab onto propellers to launch across deadly pits, and ascend to new heights using pulley-based contraptions. In modern Sonic's Mushroom Hill Zone, the action even switches to an over-the-shoulder perspective as you rail-grind through a cave filled with hedgehog-eating plants.

Sonic's Dreamcast-era escapades are covered, too. Remember the part in Sonic Adventure when Sonic was chased by a killer whale? You'll get to revisit it in the Emerald Coast stage, both in side-scrolling form (as classic Sonic) and from a third-person 3D view (as modern Sonic). Meanwhile, Sonic Adventure 2

[Below] If you've ever played Sonic Adventure, you surely remember this classic scene. SeaWorld, here we come!



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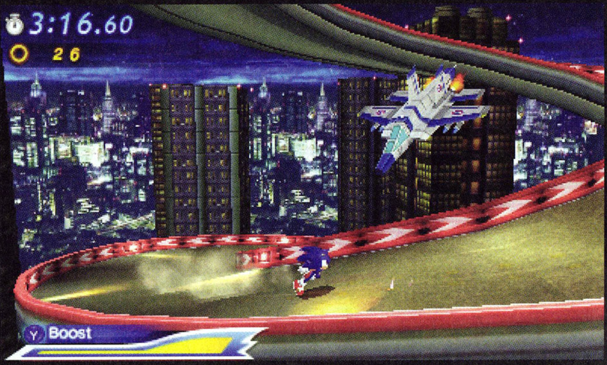
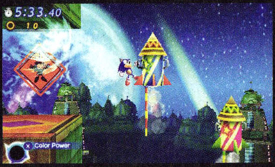
18
Y Boost



is represented by the Radical Highway, where you'll negotiate corkscrew loops, ride rockets, battle robotic GUN soldiers, and run along the side of a building. One of our favorite levels, though, is the Tropical Resort from last year's Sonic Colors. As you'd expect, the level looks fantastic—it's bursting with vibrant details, just like the original version—and it's chock full of high-speed thrills, enemy encounters, and cool platforming elements, such as catching a lift on fireworks as they blast into the sky. On top of that, the level brings back Sonic Colors's excellent Wisp power-ups, enabling you to temporarily use special abilities such as fiery explosions (if you grab a red Wisp) or a superfast laser (if you grab a cyan Wisp).

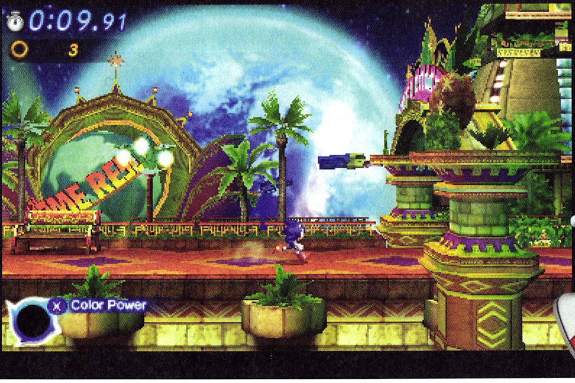
[Below] Hang on tight! Sonic's about to go on a wild ride in the Tropical Resort.



In addition to the two standard acts in each area (one for classic Sonic and one for modern Sonic), you'll get to challenge a Special Stage in which you can obtain a valuable Chaos Emerald. Reminiscent of the Special Stages from Sonic the Hedgehog 2, these involve running down a tube at full tilt, grabbing colored orbs to increase your Boost Gauge while avoiding any speed-reducing obstacles. If you're fast enough the emerald is yours, but if you're too slow you'll have to try again. Chaos Emeralds aren't the only things you'll acquire as the game progresses. At certain points, you'll gain new abilities for both versions of Sonic—classic Sonic learns the homing attack (which, ironically, makes him more like modern Sonic) and modern Sonic gains a stomp attack.

Of course, the game wouldn't be complete without boss fights. Not only will you face off against enemies in traditional one-on-one encounters, but you'll also compete against them in contests of speed, such as when you must race Metal Sonic. Surprisingly, though, Dr. Robotnik (aka Dr. Eggman) isn't the central foe in Sonic Generations. He causes trouble, for sure, but there's something more dangerous at work—an enemy so powerful that he's tearing apart the fabric of space and time; in fact, he's the whole reason that classic Sonic and modern Sonic are able to exist simultaneously and relive their past adventures. Actually, considering how awesome Sonic Generations is shaping up to be, maybe this villain has the right idea after all. —CHRIS H.

N3DS PUBLISHER: **SEGA**
DEVELOPER: **SONIC TEAM/DIMPS**
RELEASE: **FEBRUARY 2012**



WHERE CAN YOU FIND THIS MANY GREEN CAPS?

METAL GEAR SOLID: SNAKE EATER 3D

Snake gears up for his latest handheld mission.

FIRST, THE BAD news: Konami and Kojima Productions have officially delayed Metal Gear Solid: Snake Eater 3D until early next year. The good news, however, is that the Metal Gear series's Nintendo 3DS debut is still on track to be one of the system's best titles.

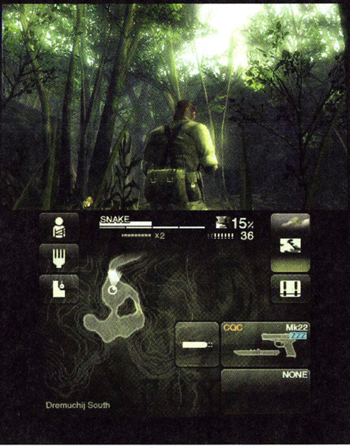
Snake Eater 3D is a portable version of the M-rated Metal Gear Solid 3, the exceptional prequel to the revolutionary Metal Gear Solid. Set in the 1960s and pulling in elements of spy fiction from the era, Snake Eater 3D stars supersoldier Naked Snake, the skilled operative who would go on to become Big Boss—the villain of the original Metal Gear and the man Solid Snake is cloned from.

What we've seen so far indicates that Konami has managed to fit the many hours of gameplay and cinematic cut-scenes that tell the game's story onto an N3DS game card without sacrificing any detail. The opening sequence, which has Snake parachuting into Russia from a cargo plane, looks every bit as good on the handheld—only it now has some real depth.

The rest of the system's features are being put to good use, too. Rather than occupying precious upper-screen real estate, weapon and item selection is now on the touch screen (as are other options), and the gyroscope is even used in certain instances, such as for balancing while crossing beams and logs. And at least in Japan, the game is getting support for some new gear: Nintendo's right-hand Circle Pad attachment. Though the hardware add-on hasn't been announced for the US, it's good to know the game will support it out of the gate. Circle Pad add-on in tow or not, Metal Gear Solid: Snake Eater 3D will arrive in February 2012. —**RANDY N.**

N3DS
PUBLISHER: **KONAMI**
DEVELOPER: **KOJIMA PRODUCTIONS**
RELEASE: **FEBRUARY 2012**

[Above] It's always wise to stop and observe your surroundings before walking into enemy territory.



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Violence
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HOW TO BE A DIY NINJA!

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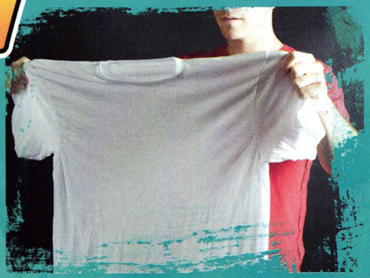

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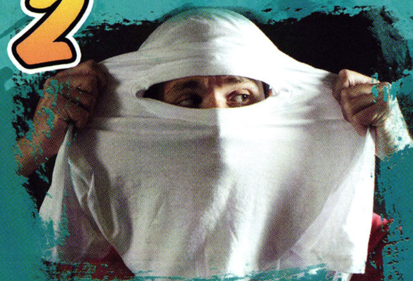

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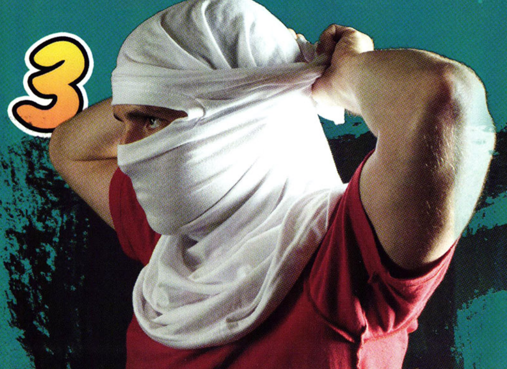


4

DRESS LIKE A NINJA

ITEMS NEEDED
- WHITE T-SHIRT
- WHITE HOODIE

1 GET A T-SHIRT.

2 PULL THE T-SHIRT OVER YOUR FACE.

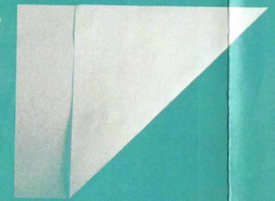
3 TIE THE SLEEVES BEHIND YOUR HEAD.

4 PUT YOUR HOODIE ON.

5 WEAR A RED SCARF FOR THE "SHINOBI" NINJA LOOK.

5

1



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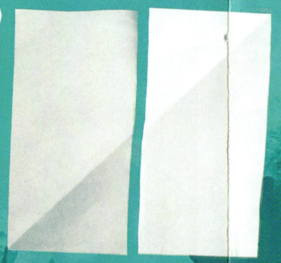

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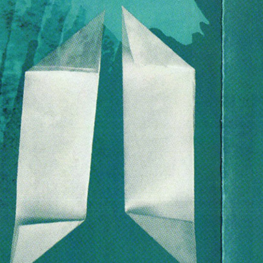

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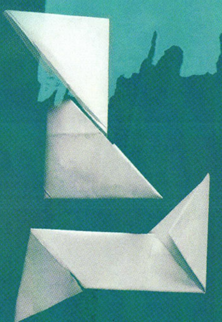

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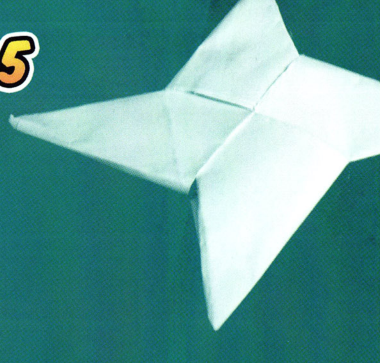

MAKE A NINJA STAR

ITEMS NEEDED
- USE THE TEMPLATE ON THE NEXT PAGE
  OR A 8.5 X 11 SHEET OF PAPER
- PAIR OF SCISSORS

1 FOLD ON THE DIAGONAL. CUT OFF THE EXCESS.

2 CUT THE SHEET INTO TWO EQUAL PIECES.

3 FOLD BOTH PIECES IN HALF. FOLD THE ENDS DIAGONALLY.

4 TURN OVER THE LEFT PIECE. PLACE RIGHT ON LEFT.

5 FOLD THE RIGHT POINT ON THE DIAGONAL ON EACH SIDE AND TUCK IT INTO THE POCKET.

Shinobi™

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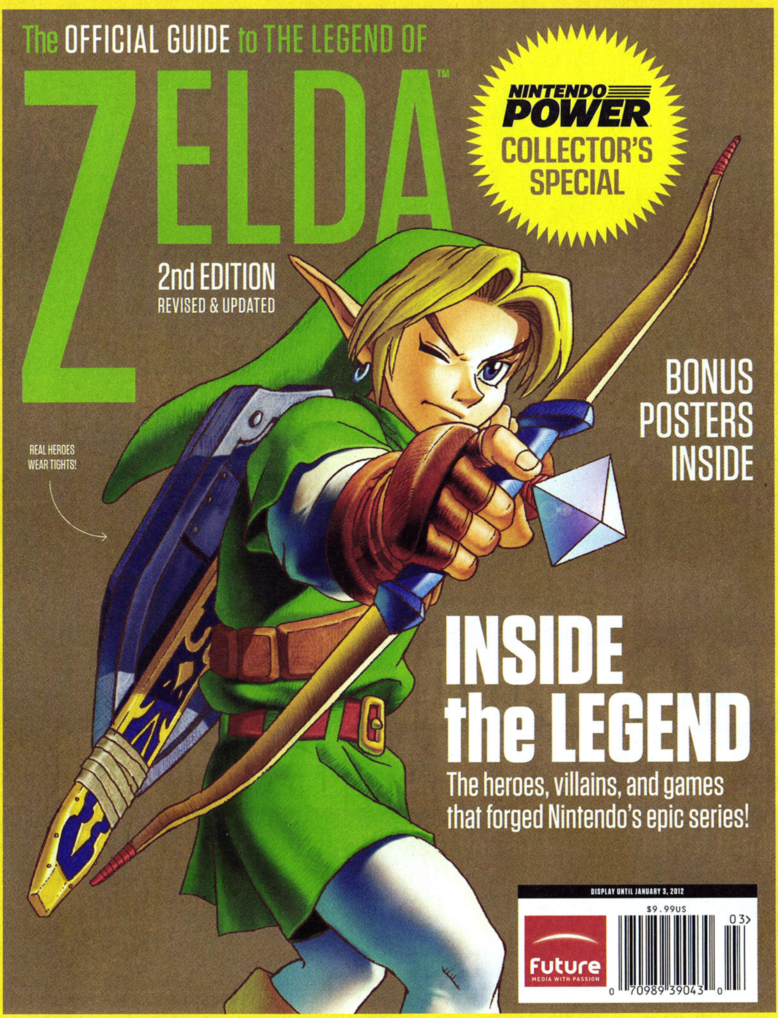

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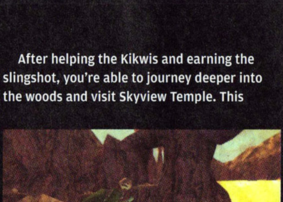
THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: SKYWARD SWORD

Over land and sea and air, Link and Zelda are there.

BY THE TIME sread this issue, The Legend of Zelda: Skyward Sword will be just about ready to land in stores, allowing players to embark on the biggest Legend of Zelda adventure ever created. But before we put the game through its paces with a review next issue (spoiler alert: we're probably going to say it's really good), we decided to take one more detailed look at the vast world that Link will get to explore.

This time out, we ventured to Faron Woods, a beautifully forested area that Nintendo unveiled as a playable work in progress back at the 2010 Electronics Entertainment Expo. Now, as then, the region is home to massive trees and magnificent giant mushrooms, as well as dangerous foes such as man-eating plants and those nasty sword-wielding Bokoblins. But the woods are also host to (usually) small creatures known as Kikwis. These fuzzy fellows are pretty timid, but they're willing to help Link on his mission to find Zelda—as long as he helps them first. To earn the Kikwis' trust, you'll have to track down the missing members of their tribe. Fortunately, by using the Goddess Sword's "dowsing" ability (used in first-person view), you're able to pinpoint their locations.

After helping the Kikwis and earning the slingshot, you're able to journey deeper into the woods and visit Skyview Temple. This

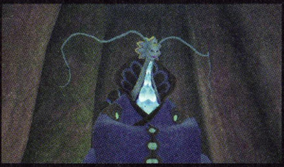


ancient structure is crumbling and full of Skulltulas (among other threats), but by acquiring the flying drone known as the beetle you'll be able to reach the lowest level of the dungeon and come face to face with Ghirahim, the Skyward Sword's main villain.

Much later in the game you'll return to Faron Woods, but its dangers will have grown considerably. Not only are the enemies tougher—stronger blue Bokoblins have replaced the red ones—but you'll have to overcome a trial that requires you to enter a world called the Silent Realm (referred to as the Siren Realm when it was unveiled at this year's E3). Though it occupies the same physical space as the regular Faron Woods, the Silent Realm version is much deadlier. You can't use your sword or any other items, and the area is patrolled by Guardians—foes so fierce that they will defeat you in a single blow. Fortunately, every time you acquire an object called a Tear of Farore, the Guardians become passive for 90 seconds. Your goal is to find 15 Tears and escape to the exit without being found and defeated, but there are numerous forces working against you, including Waking Water (which alerts the Guardians if you step in it) and enemies that act as searchlights. But make no mistake—the Silent Realm isn't about sneaking around. It's about mastering the terrain and using your speed and agility to get the job done quickly.

If you survive the Silent Realm, you'll earn a sacred artifact called the Water Dragon's Scale. This item lets Link dive and swim freely underwater; while in a body of water, simply press A to submerge, then point the Wii Remote Plus controller to move in whatever direction you want. You can also shake the Nunchuk to perform a spin move, which can smash through enemies and obstacles, and can even be used to launch Link out of the water and over objects. Such underwater mobility comes in especially useful when you reach Lake Floria, located south of Faron Woods. Here, you'll encounter the squidlike Parella Tribe and learn that the region's protector, the Water Dragon, has been injured. Once you've helped her heal her wounds (which requires a trip back to Skyview Temple), the Water Dragon aids you by granting you access to another dungeon: the Ancient Cistern.

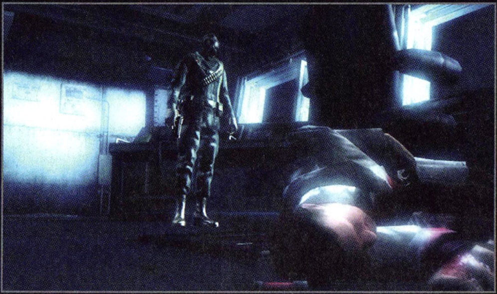
[Below] Say hello to the Water Dragon. Treat her with respect or she'll eat you.

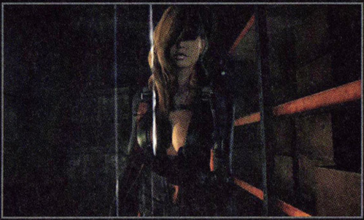


Clean, beautiful, and possessing a distinct Asian motif, the Ancient Cistern is full of underwater passages, and it's where you'll add the whip to Link's arsenal. The whip can be used in a number of ways—you can swing from objects, you can grab (and activate) levers and switches, you can pull enemies out of the sky, and in one instance you can even snag a key out of a foe's grasp. At the end of the dungeon you'll face one of the coolest Zelda bosses we've ever encountered: a six-armed statue that's been brought to life by Ghirahim's magic. The boss changes forms and attack patterns several times during the fight—it even raises the undead—and you'll have to finish it off by using its own weapons against it.

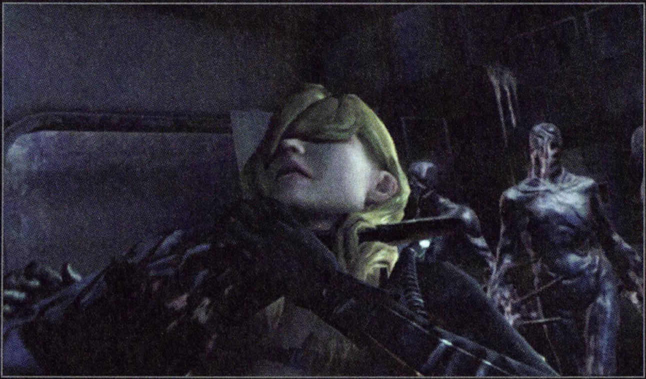
But don't think that Skyward sword is nothing but nonstop quests and combat. Like all Zelda games, there are plenty of things to do to take a break from the action. On one of the floating islands near Link's hometown of Skyloft, for example, you'll encounter a clown by the name of Dodoh; he runs a minigame, in which you launch high into the air, then attempt to earn rupees by passing through score multipliers and landing on a colored square on a huge spinning wheel. If you pass through five multipliers and then land on a 50-rupee space (not easy to do!), Dodoh promises a special prize. Such diversions only add to the list of reasons why The Legend of Zelda: Skyward Sword will be the must-play Wii game of the year. —**CHRIS H.**

Wii
PUBLISHER: NINTENDO
DEVELOPER: NINTENDO
RELEASE: NOVEMBER 2011





[Below] Rachel's not a big fan of Bio-Organic Weapons...or haircuts.

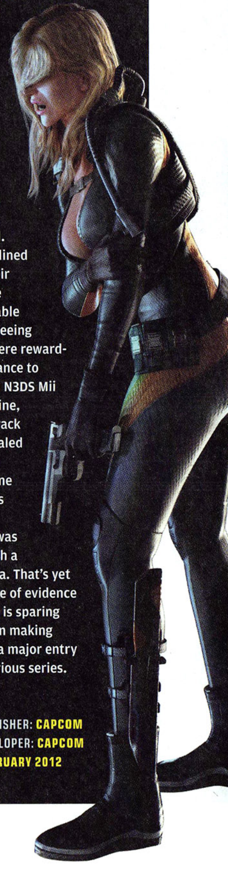


RESIDENT EVIL: REVELATIONS

RE's newest star is dead on arrival.

RESIDENT EVIL: REVELATIONS (likely to be rated M) had a huge presence at this year's Tokyo Game Show, with playable demos in a horror-themed booth, a live stage show, and plenty of trinkets for visitors. But the most intriguing part of the whole presentation may have been the new trailer, which introduces a new character named Rachel. She seems to be some sort of special agent who isn't shy about wearing a slit-open wetsuit, but hides both eyes beneath thick blonde bangs. Scenarist Dai Satou declared Rachel to be one of the key players in the game's story, but that didn't stop him from brutally killing her off halfway through her own debut.

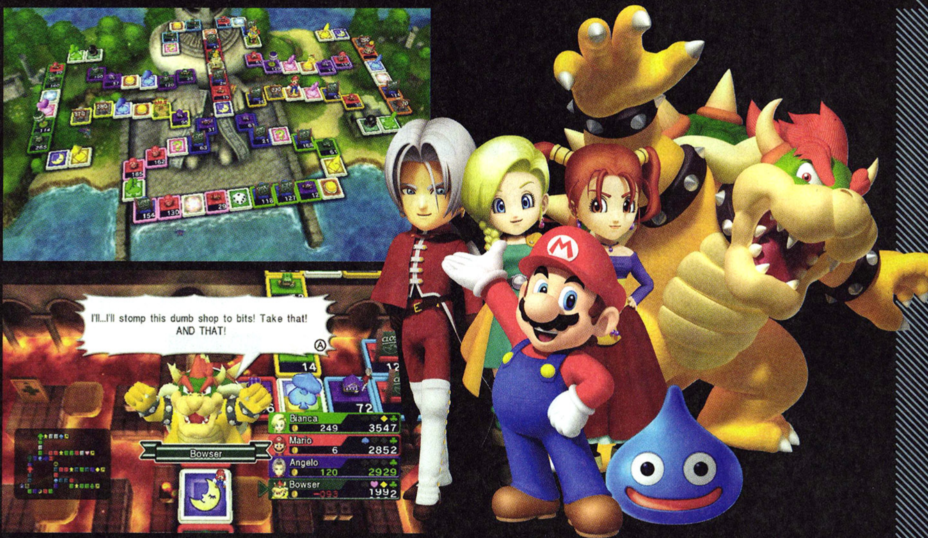
In the footage shown, Rachel seems to be sneaking around the adrift tanker ship introduced in the demo included with Resident Evil: The Mercenaries 3D, plotting something with an unseen conspirator over the radio. But when she stops to investigate some mysterious goop in the ship's hold, she's set upon by the game's new BOW (Bio-Organic Weapon) enemies. Armed with a handgun, Rachel puts up a good fight but is ultimately overpowered and splattered against a wall. Was the whole thing just a joke? That's one possibility... but another scene in the trailer shows a masked Vectro agent injecting corpses with a virus that reanimates them as BOWs, so death may not be the final curtain for the enigmatic Rachel.



Fans who lined up to get their hands on the game's playable demo after seeing the trailer were rewarded with a chance to download an N3DS Mii of Jill Valentine, and a four-track CD that revealed another TGS surprise: some of the game's sweeping soundtrack was recorded with a live orchestra. That's yet another piece of evidence that Capcom is sparing no expense in making Revelations a major entry in this illustrious series.

—CASEY L.

N3DS PUBLISHER: **CAPCOM**
DEVELOPER: **CAPCOM**
RELEASE: **FEBRUARY 2012**


I'll...I'll stomp this dumb shop to bits! Take that! AND THAT!
Bowser
Bianca 249 3547
Mario 6 2852
Angelo 120 2929
Bowser −093 1992

FORTUNE STREET

Mario teaches finance.

IN THESE TROUBLED times, it's helpful to know a little bit about how the economy works. And what better way to learn than by playing a game? Enter Fortune Street, a board-game-style title in which you purchase properties, increase their value, and do everything possible to maximize your net worth.

Fortune Street—the latest in a previously Japanese-only series originally from the mind of Dragon Quest creator Yuji Horii—is similar to Monopoly, only infused with a healthy dose of Dragon Quest- and Super Mario-ness. Not only does the roster include several characters from the two franchises, but the game boards are set in locales such as Yoshi's Island, Delfino Plaza, Castle Trodain, and Mount Magmageddon.

As you would expect from a Monopoly-esque title, the boards are filled with properties that you can purchase. These places are stores—bakeries, pharmacies, clockmakers' shops, etc.—that sell various goods. When an opponent lands on that space, he must pay a certain price for those items. The fee goes up as you invest more money into these shops, and as you buy up neighboring properties. If you have stores in the red district and then purchase a new one in that area, for example, the values for all the establishments you own in that district go up. This means a rival player will have to shell out beaucoup bucks when he lands on one of your assets in that neighborhood. Another way to earn money is to buy stock in a particular district; you earn more dividends as the territory flourishes.

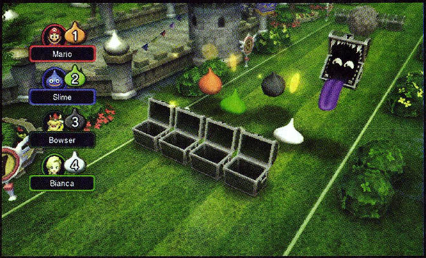
This sounds more complex than it actually is, and Fortune Street does a good job of laying out all these concepts in an easy-to-grasp manner. It certainly doesn't hurt that you're playing with an array of familiar faces. Additionally, up to three friends can join you via local multiplayer, or online through Nintendo Wi-Fi Connection. —**JUSTIN C.**

Wii

PUBLISHER: **NINTENDO**
DEVELOPER: **SQUARE ENIX**
RELEASE: **DECEMBER 2011**

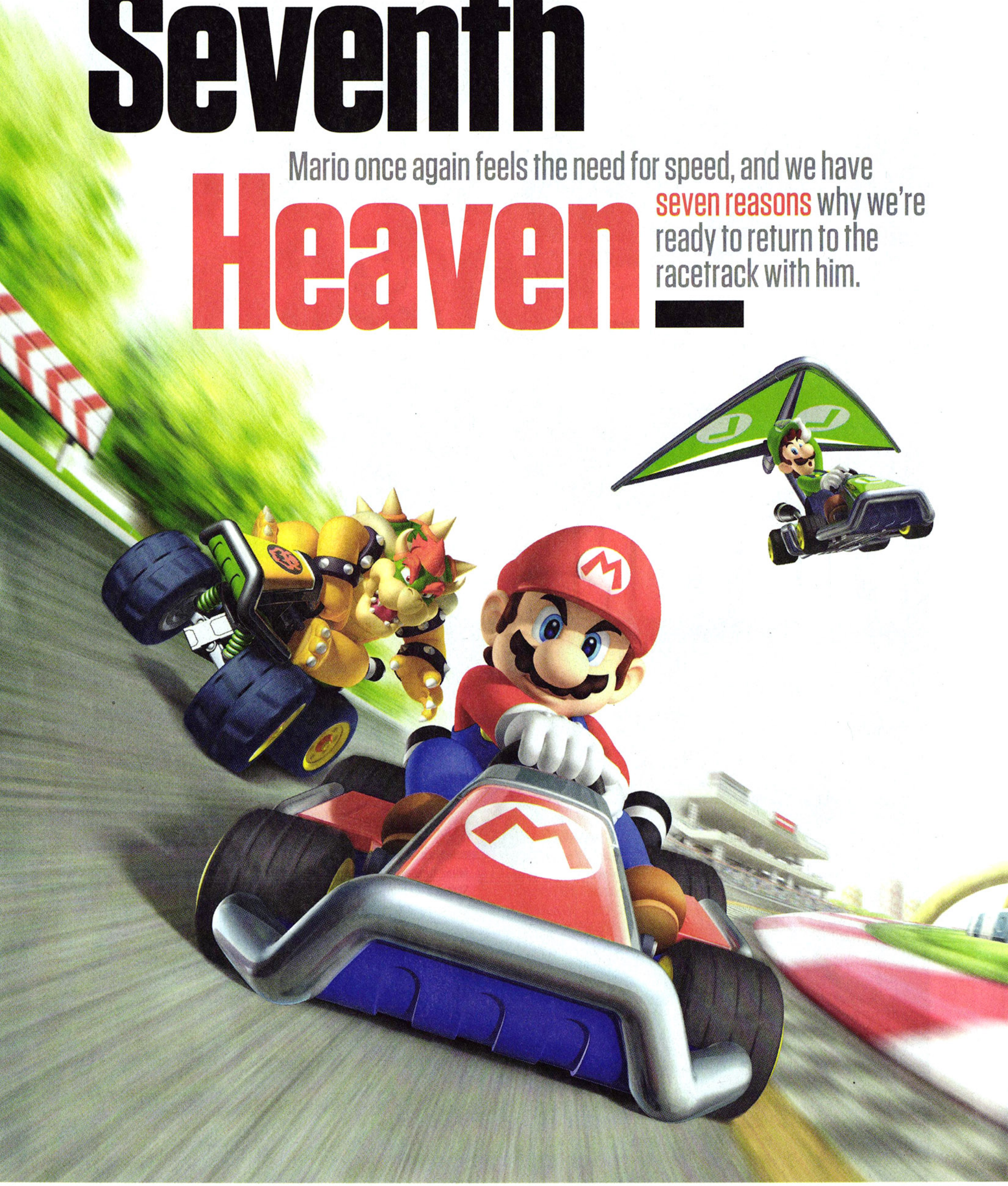
Hey, I think I just warped! That sure was a fast trip!
440
80
120
50
42
1934
2000
2187
2076

Minigames would make Wall Street a lot more interesting.


Mario
Slime
Bowser
Bianca

Seventh Heaven

Mario once again feels the need for speed, and we have seven reasons why we're ready to return to the racetrack with him.

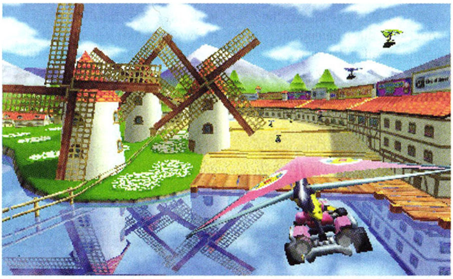


BY **PHIL THEOBALD**

PUBLISHER: **NINTENDO** DEVELOPER: **NINTENDO** RELEASE: **DECEMBER 2011** **N3DS**

SUPER MARIO KART, Mario Kart 64, Mario Kart: Super Circuit, Mario Kart: Double Dash!!, Mario Kart DS, Mario Kart Wii, and now, Mario Kart 7. One of these titles is clearly not like the others. When we asked Hideki Konno, Mario Kart 7's producer to explain the reasoning behind the decision to number this latest entry in the long-running Mario Kart series instead of using a subtitle, he explained, "If you go back and count all the games made for consumer game machines, this is the seventh Mario Kart. Each of the previous subtitles meant different things to different users, but this is a nice, basic title that sends the same message to all of the countless Mario Kart players around the world: We made a seventh Mario Kart. 'Mario Kart 7...' It's simple and easy to remember, don't you think?"

You know what? We agree. To celebrate this newfound appreciation for the number seven, we're taking a deeper look at Mario Kart 7 and highlighting seven features that we think make this game one of the holiday season's must-own N3DS titles.



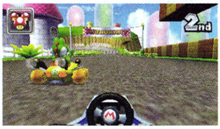
1

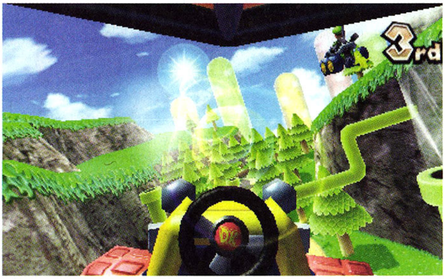
You Are Mario

As a Nintendo 3DS title, the most immediately noticeable enhancement that Mario Kart 7 brings to the series is the depth provided by the system's stereoscopic 3D screen. As Konno puts it, "Stereoscopic 3D makes height, width, and depth much easier to grasp. That makes it a good fit for racing games like Mario Kart, and I believe that it makes for particularly satisfying gameplay with the gliding and underwater racing mechanics in this installment." Since the player is always driving "into" the screen, the 3D graphics create the feeling of really sitting in a go-kart and whizzing past the various crazy obstacles that populate each track.

The new first-person perspective enhances this sensation by allowing you to view the action from the driver's point of view. After six games of looking at our characters' backs, it's a bit odd seeing only a steering wheel and the front of our kart, but it makes for an exciting new experience. When using the first-person view, you can take advantage of a new control scheme made possible by the N3DS hardware: the gyro sensor allows the player to steer by simply tilting the system left and right. Admittedly, this can be a bit of a challenge—it's tricky to move the system while holding down both shoulder buttons to drag an item behind our kart and drift around a corner, for instance. With a bit of practice, though, it makes for a rewarding race.

[Right] With a first-person view and gyro controls, it feels like you're actually riding in Mario's kart.





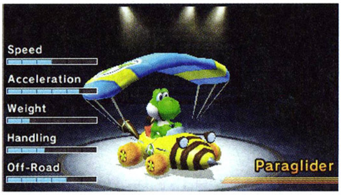
SCREENSHOTS HAVE BEEN CAPTURED IN 2D MODE.

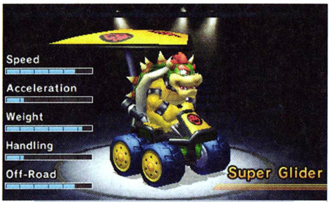
2 Build Your Own

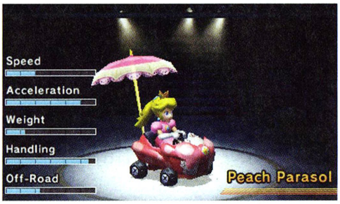
Originally Mario Kart participants were resigned to driving their own default karts. That was fine, but it certainly didn't lead to much variety. More recent entries in the series have allowed the characters to race in various karts, at the player's choice—an improvement, sure, but Mario Kart 7 takes it to the next level. Now you're able to customize the racers' vehicles by choosing which body, tires, and glider (see the "Land, Sea, and Air" section) to equip. Each part affects the kart's speed, acceleration, weight, handling, and off-road capabilities. Putting together the perfect kart is instrumental in finishing ahead of the pack.

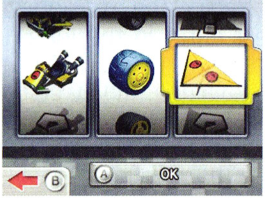
When playing Grand Prix mode, you can build a kart only before each cup (which consists of four races). Because you'll encounter a variety of course types throughout a given a cup, it's usually better to create a kart that functions well in all categories. Time Trial mode, however, is a different story. This is where you'll want to tinker with the kart before each race to shave a few precious seconds off of your overall time. A kart with good handling, for example, will be useful on a track with many curves whereas one with an off-road focus will make plowing through dirt-covered courses a breeze.

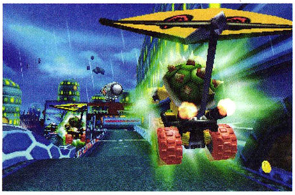
Naturally, one shouldn't let function get in the way of style. It's also important to create a kart that is worth being seen in. To that end, several different parts can be unlocked by collecting the many coins that are scattered around Mario Kart 7's tracks. We've seen zany karts that look like plants and vegetables in addition to new karts based on the different characters in the game. The unlockable wheels tend to be more traditional, although there is a set fashioned out of wood, and you can never go wrong with a good set of monster tires. Available gliders include an old-fashioned paraglider, a giant flower, and Princess Peach's parasol.

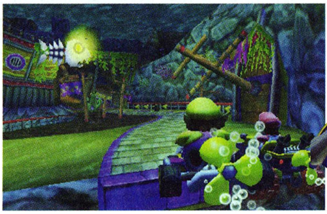


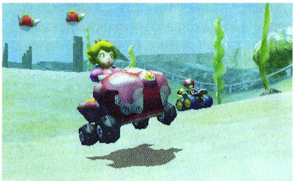








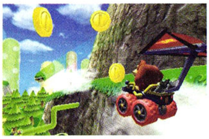


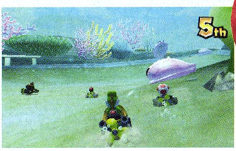


3 Land, Sea, and Air

"Gliders?" we hear you ask, "Why would my kart need a glider?" That leads us to another one of Mario Kart 7's biggest new features. The racers in this game are no longer restricted to the road. These updated karts can take to the sky as well as the water. Unlike the motorcycles in Mario Kart Wii, these new vehicles are not a separate driving option. Instead, the player's custom karts will automatically convert to air or sea mode when necessary and then switch back when the tires return to the road. As soon as a kart hits the water, a small propeller emerges from the back to push the vehicle along. The kart drives along the seabed, so it's not terribly different from standard racing, but the vehicle does feel a bit lighter when submerged.

Mario Kart fans are intimately familiar with the ever-present Boost Pads that litter each track. These colorful patches give you a temporary speed burst that's perfect for blasting past rival racers. This time around the traditional Boost Pads are orange, but there are also blue Boost Pads, usually found at the edges of ramps. When driving over one of these blue pads, get ready—they send karts flying into the sky, and a glider pops out of the top of the vehicles, allowing them to soar through the air. Players are able to adjust the pitch and yaw, and although karts can't fly indefinitely, careful control will let them soar over and around obstacles.





4

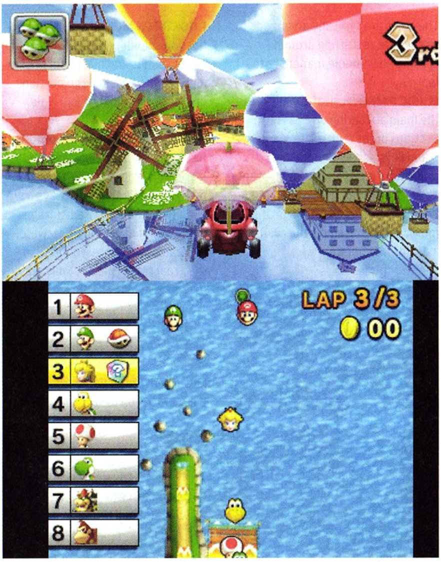
Kart Party

Mario Kart is always fun to play, but it's even more enjoyable with multiple people. Mario Kart 7 supports up to eight players in both standard racing modes—Grand Prix and Vs.—which allow players to race on any track that has been unlocked.

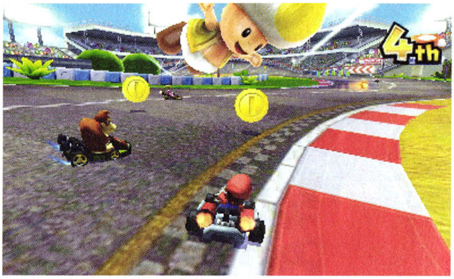
The game supports Wi-Fi play, as well, allowing for random matches against racers from across the globe. Additionally, there's a strong social aspect thanks to a new Community feature that works similiar to leagues and clans in other popular online games. (See the full interview with Hideki Konno on page 48 for more information.) On a more local level, if players are near friends who don't have a copy of the game handy, Download Play will let those friends race anyway. The caveat here is that only the player who has a Mario Kart 7 game card in his or her system can choose a driver and customize a kart. All of the other players must use Shy Guy and a stock vehicle.

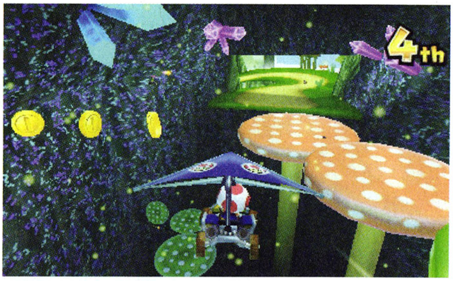
Adding to the multiplayer festivities is the built-in Mario Kart Channel that maintains the game's StreetPass and SpotPass features. Konno explains this mode thusly:

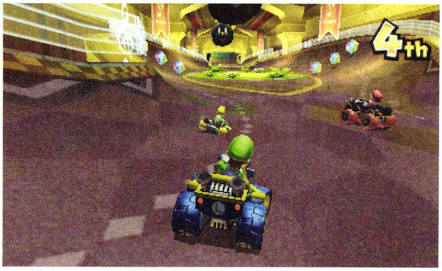
"All of the StreetPass and SpotPass data is collected in the 'Mario Kart Channel.' When you pass a fellow Mario Kart player, you will exchange your respective ghost data and match histories. There's also a feature that allows you to challenge the Mario Kart players you've passed with to an online race. That way, even if you haven't registered friends from your school or workplace, you'll still have a chance to race against people near you. As for SpotPass, you'll automatically receive new ghost data every day. It all happens automatically, so even if you've been away, you'll still be able to race against the downloaded ghost data. New ghost challengers will fill your Nintendo 3DS!"



SCREENSHOTS HAVE BEEN CAPTURED IN 2D MODE.







5

Hit the Road

A racing game without tracks upon which to race is...well, a parking game. Luckily, Mario Kart 7 is chock-full of new courses. Let's take a look at the roads that must be conquered in the game's first two cups, then bask in some returning venues.

Mushroom Cup

TOAD CIRCUIT: Like most of the initial tracks in the Mario Kart series, this is a fairly basic course. There aren't a whole lot of surprises, so it's the perfect venue for getting acclimated to the action. Toad Circuit does, however, feature the first use of the glider.

DAISY HILLS: This course has you tearing through a quaint little village. Mii characters are lined up along the sides to check out the competition. There's another gliding segment here, and it's a big one—you must dodge hot-air balloons and a windmill before landing. Practice these in-flight skills—they will prove useful later.

CHEEP CHEEP LAGOON: Early in this course, the road comes to an abrupt stop just past a sign that declares, "Go! Dive! Go!" It's plain enough: this is the first underwater segment in the game. There is also a very obvious instance of alternate routes here. At one point, the player can opt to drive through a flooded section of a cave or glide over the water while dodging stalactites.

SHY GUY BAZAAR: Multiple routes play a prominent role in this Arabian-styled market. Players can weave through the various fruit stands that litter the streets or bounce along the awnings over the shops.

Flower Cup

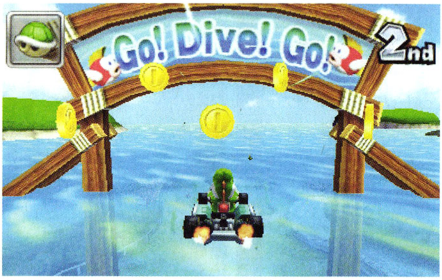
WUHU LOOP: The most prominent feature of this track is that there are no laps. Instead, it's one long stretch that's divided into three "sections." Also, there are giant cars to dodge. You gotta watch out for those giant cars.

MARIO CIRCUIT: Take a drive around and through Peach's castle. There are plenty of coins scattered around here, so there's ample opportunity to earn new kart parts. The coins are typically arranged to encourage drifting around corners—a valuable maneuver to learn.

MUSIC PARK: Musical gimmicks are the main attraction on this track. Sections of the course are giant piano keys and xylophone bars that sound notes when driven over. There are also giant Piranha Plants to dodge, as well as fat, bouncing music notes that shake the road like a drum when they jump.

ROCK ROCK MOUNTAIN: This track has you spending a lot of time in the air. Big jumps and masterful gliding allow racers to skip large portions of the course and fly over rivals.

To complement these (and other) new courses, plenty of classic Mario Kart tracks return. However, many of the familiar roadways have been tweaked to take advantage of the new gliding and underwater mechanics. Here are a handful of the great tracks players will be able to revisit.



Shell Cup

Luigi Raceway (N64)
Bowser Castle 1 (GBA)
Mushroom Gorge (Wii)
Luigi's Mansion (DS)

Banana Cup

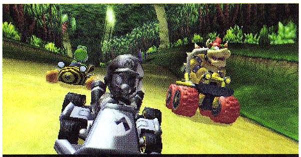
Koopa Beach (N64)
Mario Circuit 2 (SNES)
Coconut Mall (Wii)
Waluigi's Pinball (DS)

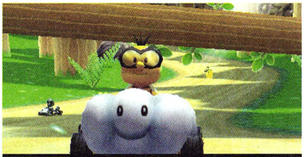
6

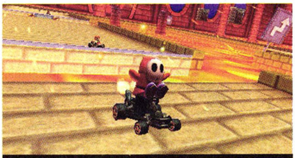
Drivers to Your Cars, Please

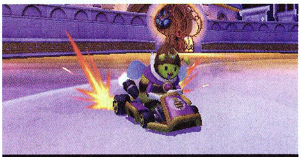
One of the first things fans want to know whenever a new Mario Kart title is announced is what playable characters will make up the roster. At the start of the game there are eight characters from which to choose: Mario, Luigi, Peach, Yoshi, Bowser, Donkey Kong, Toad, and a Koopa Troopa. Like in most other games in the franchise, though, there are plenty more hidden racers for skilled players to unlock (including your personal Mii). Although we certainly don't want to spoil all of the surprises, we will share a few of them with you.

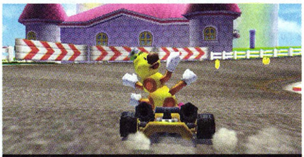
As has been previously announced, the first-time competitors include Metal Mario (the reflective silver version of our favorite plumber) and Lakitu (the cloud-bound Koopa who normally serves as the referee in the Mario Kart series). Two additional racers making their playable debut in Mario Kart 7 are Wiggler (the caterpillar-like enemy from Mario's platforming adventures) and Honey Queen (the proper name of the friendly queen bee from the Super Mario Galaxy titles). This isn't the first time Shy Guy has appeared in the series, but he has a bigger role than ever before. Previously, he was merely an obstacle or a spectator. In Mario Kart DS he was available as a driver for use in Download Play multiplayer. Now he has finally attained full-on playable-character status. Congratulations, Shy Guy! This is your time to shine!

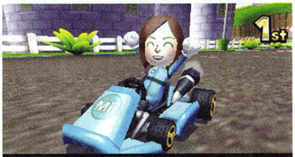

Metal Mario


Lakitu

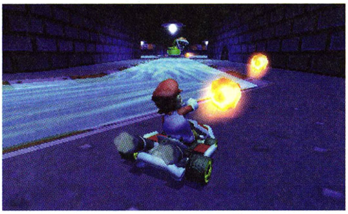

Shy Guy

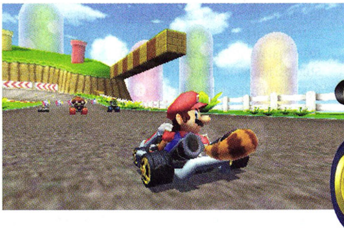

Honey Queen


Wiggler



Mii





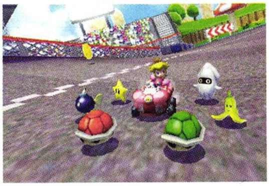
7

Road-Rage Weapons

Mario Kart wouldn't be Mario Kart without a mess of crazy items to toss at your opponents during a race. Not surprisingly, many of the classic munitions return for MK7. Power-ups like the Red Shell, Green Shell, Banana Peel, and Lightning Bolt all behave like we're used to, but it's worth noting that the infamous blue Spiny Shell lacks the wings that it has sprouted in recent Mario Kart games. Instead, the dreaded projectile travels along the ground on its way to the race leader, so if you hear its trademark hum, be sure to get out of the way.

Among the new items are the Fire Flower, which first appeared in the original Super Mario Bros., and the Super Leaf, which debuted in Super Mario Bros. 3. Those familiar with the Fire Flower can probably guess its effect here: the kart's driver is able to launch a barrage of fireballs at his opponents (though the power-up is time-limited in this instance). When hit, the rival's kart spins out, allowing the attacker to speed past. Like many projectiles in the game, the fireballs can be tossed behind your kart as well, in order to ward off approaching drivers. The Super Leaf causes the player's kart to sprout a raccoon tail, much like in Super Mario 3D Land. The tail is more than mere decoration; a swat of this handy appendage can send an opposing driver's kart into a spin, and it's useful for deflecting incoming Koopa Shells (though if you miss the shell, you'll lose the fuzzy protuberance).

Perhaps the most devastating new power-up, though, is the Lucky 7. Snagging this rare item causes seven separate items to circle around the player's kart, from which they can be fired off one at a time. Snagging a single Lucky 7 places the powers of a Green Shell, a Red Shell, a Mushroom, a Banana, a Blooper, a Super Star, and a Bob-omb at the player's disposal. Fear the Lucky 7.



SCREENSHOTS HAVE BEEN CAPTURED IN 2D MODE.

Crew Chief

When it comes to Mario Kart, there are few people more knowledgeable on the subject than the series's longtime producer, Hideki Konno. The kart master was kind enough to chat with us for a bit and answer all of our burning questions.

NINTENDO POWER The biggest new feature in Mario Kart 7 is probably the addition of hang-gliding and underwater sections. Where did those ideas come from?

HIDEKI KONNO When we were developing previous entries in the Mario Kart series, we often thought, "wouldn't it be cool if you could drive through water, or soar through the air?" Then, after we completed Mario Kart Wii and began exploring various ideas for the N3DS version, a member of the team built a prototype out of the Mario Kart Wii code that allowed for underwater driving. That concept of a Mario Kart with underwater driving and midair gliding seemed really cool, and that set us in that direction for Mario Kart 7. But what really clinched it was how well these mechanics worked with stereoscopic 3D. The team member who came up with this plan is actually the one directing Mario Kart 7.

It was mentioned at E3 that Retro Studios was contributing to Mario Kart 7 in some way. Could you clarify their role in the game's development?

First, let me take this opportunity to express my deep gratitude to everyone at Retro Studios. Our production group was charged with simultaneously developing nintendogs + cats and Mario Kart 7, but since nintendogs + cats was a launch title, we decided to assign more personnel to its development. That left us worried that we wouldn't have enough staff to handle the art and course design of Mario Kart 7, so it was suggested to us that we collaborate with Retro Studios. Knowing that Retro Studios has a strong track record and a long history of creating quality products with Nintendo, I asked them to collaborate with us on aspects like course and character design. The course designers and artists at both EAD and Retro Studios worked closely together to create what I consider to be very prolific and high-quality work.

What sorts of improvements/additions can we expect to the online functionality over previous installments? Is there anything you'll be able to do to better prevent cheating?

Mario Kart 7 utilizes the various connectivity features of the N3DS, including StreetPass and SpotPass, to offer a number of unique experiences and play styles for Mario Kart fans. One of them, called Community, is a new way of handling matchmaking.

The Community feature allows players to create a community. Groups of classmates or coworkers, and even people who are friends on social-networking services, can create communities that allow them to play together on a regular basis—not just for a single session. There is no limit to the number of players who can join a community.

When players join a community, they'll automatically be matched together and can race against each other while chatting with preset messages. All communities have their own leaderboards, so players will be free to compete for top rankings, or they can ignore that and simply enjoy getting together regularly to play with one another. You won't need a Nintendo 3DS friend code to join a community.

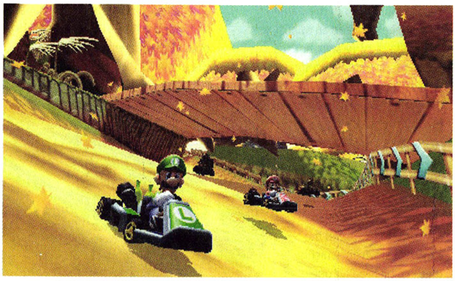
Each player can search for a community that feels comfortable to them, or perhaps even create their own community and advertise it on things like social-networking services. It could be a great way for players to expand their circle of friends who play Mario Kart.

Will "snaking" be possible in Mario Kart 7?

You cannot perform "snaking" the same way you could in Mario Kart DS. It's probably easiest to visualize the way the game handles by thinking of Mario Kart Wii.

Speaking of Mario Kart Wii, why didn't you bring back the motorcycles from that game?

We added motorcycles to Mario Kart Wii because yanking the Wii



LUIGI
super Mario
3rd

SCREENSHOTS HAVE BEEN CAPTURED IN 2D MODE.

Remote upward to make your bike perform a wheelie felt so good. For this installment, we figured it would take a lot of time to make a game that handled even better than Mario Kart Wii, so we decided to focus our attention on the karts. Gameplay and tuning are incredibly time-consuming.

This is the first time a Mario Kart game has offered a first-person option. What was the impetus for adding that?
As you said, we're experimenting with a "driver's perspective" mode for the first time. This mode is linked to the gyro sensor control scheme, allowing for a more dynamic and exciting racing experience. You can also switch to the driver's perspective during Grand Prix replays; I think it's a lot of fun to relive a race from such an impactful perspective.

What do the new power-ups bring to the game?
The new items we've added to this installment, including the Super Leaf and Fire Flower, make for a very fresh and fun experience. They add new attacks like being able to knock away a foe by spinning your tail, and shooting fireballs at a rival who has pulled ahead of you.

What's your favorite new track?
I suppose they're all my favorites. I have a special place in my heart for each and every one of them, which comes from racing each course hundreds upon hundreds of times during the process of fine-tuning them.

How did you decide which classic courses to include?
We considered all of the courses from past games, and had team meetings to select the ones we wanted to include. Of course, everyone has their own favorites, so the decisions were very difficult to make.

Was it difficult to add gliding and underwater segments to the classic courses without upsetting the balance for those tracks?
Yes, it certainly was. Of course, challenging something new is always difficult, but adding elements like flight and underwater driving presented a host of problems. But I believe that confronting such challenges leads to new innovations, so it's worth doing.

For the first time, players will be able to customize their rides in Mario Kart 7. What do you feel that adds to the experience?
As you mentioned, it is now possible to customize the karts by combining different frames, tires, and gliders. Allowing players to customize their karts with parts that fit their individual racing style or the track conditions expands the scope of the strategy within the game. Of course, players may choose to customize for either aesthetics or function; I think it can be equally fun either way.

Are there any lessons you learned from the development of Mario Kart Wii or Mario Kart DS that you've applied to Mario Kart 7?
Each time we create a new Mario Kart, there are so many new discoveries and so many lessons to learn from them. It would be difficult to give you a concrete example, but every member of the team wrestles with these lessons in their efforts to make each new installment more interesting than the last.

There are quite a few new features in Mario Kart 7. Did you feel it was important to really shake things up with this installment?
There are a lot of new features, but I don't think there's anything particularly special about that. We always try to attempt new things in order to make a more enjoyable experience for Mario Kart players.

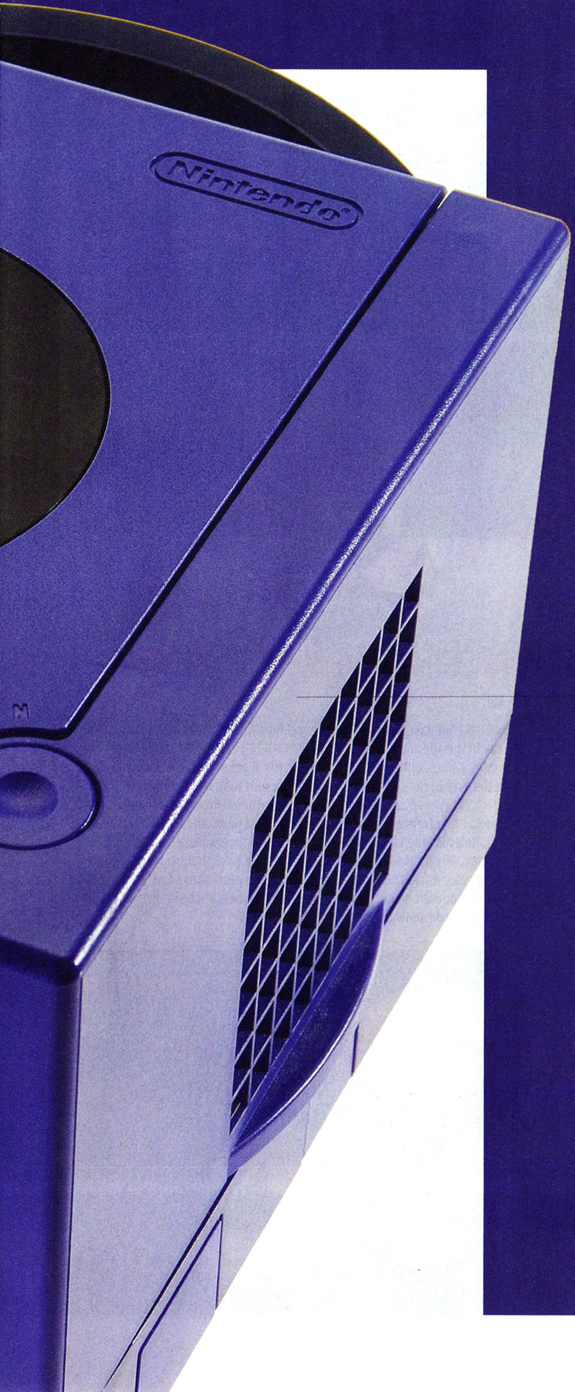
In your opinion, what makes a great Mario Kart game? What's really important in crafting that experience?
Mario Kart is "a lively communication game for everyone." That's been the concept from the very first Mario Kart, all the way until the Internet-compatible Mario Kart 7 of today. And I don't think that concept will fundamentally change in the future, either; I want to continue developing games that all of the Mario Kart players around the world can enjoy. And of course, that includes making sure that players will forever be able to enjoy the single-player aspect like Time Trials and the Grand Prix as well.

Have you ever considered expanding the roster to include characters from other franchises, à la Super Smash Bros.?
No, we've never seriously considered that.

Which racer do you typically choose while playing Mario Kart and why?
We have a varied cast of racers, and I play with many different ones. But if I had to choose one...I guess I really want Luigi to do more to stand out from the crowd, and I always want him to try harder, so I suppose I pick him the most often. I guess I just can't help but root for Luigi. [Laughs]

We figure you probably can't talk about this too much, but we have to ask: have you started thinking about how Mario Kart could take advantage of the Wii U console?
I can't get into the specifics, but I do want to create a new and enjoyable Mario Kart that uses the unique functions of the Wii U. Anything beyond that I have to keep secret. Please bear with me for now!

POWER
RESET
NINTENDO
GAMECUBE
SLOT A
SLOT B



*We celebrate 10 years of the **Nintendo GameCube** with the definitive list of the top **25 games** that you need to own.*

THINK INSIDE *the* CUBE

THE NINTENDO GAMECUBE—which celebrates the tenth anniversary of its North American release on November 18—is in a bit of a weird historical place. Coming between the groundbreaking Nintendo 64 system (which set the standard for modern polygonal game design) and the innovative Wii console (which redefined gaming via motion controls), the GameCube is, in many ways, the most traditional system that Nintendo has ever released. (Well, traditional aside from its boxy shape, the handle on its back, and the fact that its most well-known color was purple.) But traditional hardware doesn't mean me-too games; on the contrary, the system played host to a number of fantastic titles, many of which were overflowing with new ideas and set new standards in their genres or series. In fact, many GameCube games still hold up very well today. In honor of the decade since the system's release, we're counting down the top 25 games you've gotta own if you want to have the ultimate GameCube library. And don't forget—even if you don't have a GameCube console, all of these games are playable on Wii as well.

25

IKARUGA

PUBLISHER: ATARI
RELEASE: 2003

WHY IT WAS A MUST-HAVE THEN: Treasure made another 2D shooter? And it's only on the GameCube? Sign us up. **WHY IT'S A MUST-HAVE NOW:** It may not be the best shooter ever, but it might be the purest. It's a beautifully stark, elegant exercise in design, and a meaner challenge for the reflexes we may never see. **THE BEST PART:** It's often the case nowadays that finishing a game isn't such a big achievement. Games are designed to be finished. Games want to tell a story or explore a world at a certain pace and so they help the player along and do what it takes to make sure they reach the end with a modest amount of effort. Ikaruga does not do this. Seeing the credits roll at the end of Ikaruga is a moment that a gamer can truly be proud of—proof of skills well beyond the ordinary.

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ANIMAL CROSSING

PUBLISHER: NINTENDO | RELEASE: 2002

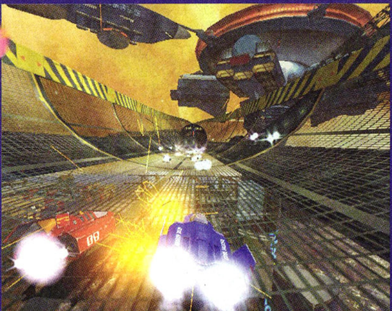
WHY IT WAS A MUST-HAVE THEN: Animal Crossing's real-time gameplay meant that there was something new happening every day in this life simulator. **WHY IT'S A MUST-HAVE NOW:** Though there have been subsequent Animal Crossing games, only this one allows you to collect more than a dozen fully playable NES games. What better way to take a break from pulling weeds than with a few rounds of Donkey Kong or Excitebike? **THE BEST PART:** Anyone who has played Animal Crossing is familiar with Tom Nook. This fuzzy loan shark...er, entrepreneur practically owns your town, and as soon as you move in, you end up working for him. He's also the fellow who builds (and later upgrades) your house, so you quickly end up indebted to the guy. It will take weeks and months of hard work, but eventually you'll earn enough bells to get Nook off your back. The relief that you feel once your loans have been repaid is surprisingly real, and your effort doesn't go unrewarded. You have the best house in town, and Tom builds a golden statue of you in the town square.

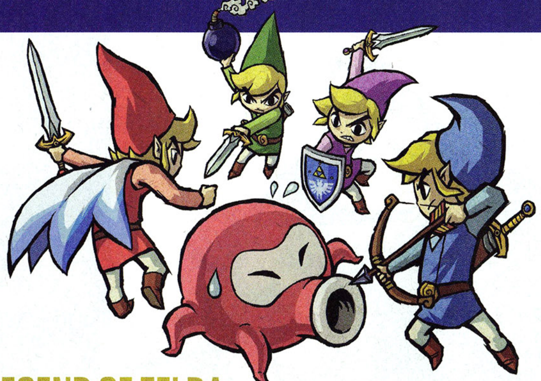
23

F-ZERO GX

PUBLISHER: NINTENDO | RELEASE: 2003

WHY IT WAS A MUST-HAVE THEN: Arcade racing games didn't come any faster—and the huge number of racers on the track was unprecedented. **WHY IT'S A MUST-HAVE NOW:** This was the first collaboration between Sega and Nintendo, and remains one of the best racers to come out of the former. Plus, it still looks amazing. **THE BEST PART:** The story mode in F-Zero GX was a first for the series—it was also completely nuts. It followed the adventures of Captain Falcon through a series of challenges and wacky cut-scenes in which he interacted with other characters in the game's universe, such as Samurai Goroh. Whether escaping from a collapsing building or racing against a vicious gang, it offered a fresh new take on the fast-paced racing gameplay.





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THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: FOUR SWORDS ADVENTURES

PUBLISHER: NINTENDO | RELEASE: 2004

WHY IT WAS A MUST-HAVE THEN: Multiplayer action + sweet 2D visuals = a Zelda game unlike any other. **WHY IT'S A MUST-HAVE NOW:** Admittedly, it's probably tough to find the GBA systems and link cables you'd need to play this game properly these days, but if you can do so you're in for a great time. **THE BEST PART:** Although Four Swords Adventures is pretty decent in single-player mode, there's nothing quite like teaming up with three friends to lay the smack down on the evil that's menacing Hyrule. When all four of you are working together to solve puzzles, slay enemies, and subdue bosses, the experience is incredibly satisfying. (It's even more so when the level is complete and you're ranked as the top player.)

1st
3rd
4th
1st

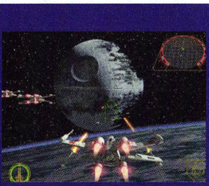
Fire Ball
2 hits

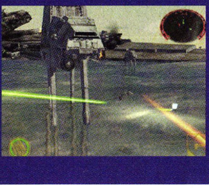
21

TALES OF SYMPHONIA

PUBLISHER: NAMCO | RELEASE: 2004

WHY IT WAS A MUST-HAVE THEN: In the great game drought of summer '04, the epic length and high production values of Tales of Symphonia offered a cool drink of water to thirsty RPG fans. **WHY IT'S A MUST-HAVE NOW:** Despite its advancing age, the design of Symphonia still feels quite modern, and it boasts one of the most loveable casts in Tales-series history. **THE BEST PART:** A storyline packed with dramatic twists and surprisingly deep character development has led your ever-growing party to the storyline climax at the universe's central world tree, which has gone berserk due to an explosive overdose of mana. After a lengthy animated cut-scene, Lloyd's party joins hands with former enemies to battle through a lengthy dungeon and face down a major boss, as the fate of your world hangs in the balance... And then the "insert disc 2" prompt comes up, and you realize that the game is *barely halfway done.*





20

STAR WARS ROGUE LEADER: ROGUE SQUADRON II

PUBLISHER: LUCASARTS | RELEASE: 2001

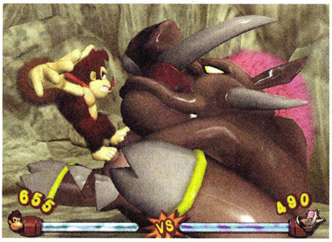
WHY IT WAS A MUST-HAVE THEN: At the GameCube's launch, Rogue Leader was the finest example of what the system was capable of doing graphically. **WHY IT'S A MUST-HAVE NOW:** Rogue Leader sports some great extra features that give us a glimpse at the world of game development, such as audio commentary on every level and a making-of documentary. **THE BEST PART:** A nice variety of stages in Rogue Leader allows players to fly through semiobscure areas of the Star Wars universe, such as the Maw or the Imperial Academy (where you steal the Imperial shuttle that the Rebels use against the Empire in *Return of the Jedi*). Still, despite all of these locales, we still find ourselves returning to the first stage, which is a re-creation of the legendary *Death Star* attack during the Battle of Yavin (the end battle from the climax of the original *Star Wars*). Call us suckers for nostalgia, but speeding through the *Death Star*'s trench with Darth Vader on our tail and John Williams's soundtrack blaring in the background always gets our blood flowing.

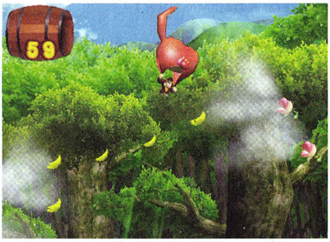
19

DONKEY KONG JUNGLE BEAT

PUBLISHER: NINTENDO | **RELEASE:** 2005

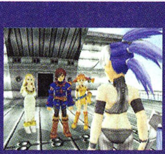
WHY IT WAS A MUST-HAVE THEN: Nintendo is known for its innovation of existing genres, and Jungle Beat may be one of the very best examples of this. It's a platformer, controlled by *bongo drums.* **WHY IT'S A MUST-HAVE NOW:** It's not just a platformer with a wacky peripheral—DKJB is a great-looking, great-playing game, regardless. **THE BEST PART:** In this case, the best part is the experience as a whole. You wouldn't think that clapping your hands and banging on drums to control Donkey Kong would work—but it does, and very well. Squaring off against a boss character and punching the living daylights out of him by playing the drums is, frankly, insane. The New Play Control version for Wii doesn't use the drums, but it's still a great game—a testament to its freedom from a gimmick.

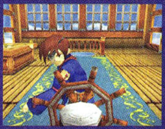




18

SKIES OF ARCADIA LEGENDS





PUBLISHER: SEGA
RELEASE: 2003

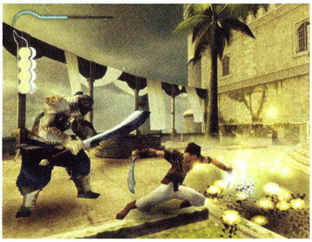
WHY IT WAS A MUST-HAVE THEN: Sure, it was a Dreamcast port, but it was a port of an overlooked gem, and this became the first real RPG on the GameCube. **WHY IT'S A MUST-HAVE NOW:** Skies of Arcadia is a true classic in the genre, boasting numerous mechanical innovations while nailing the upbeat, spirit-of-adventure vibe that made early RPGs so much fun. **THE BEST PART:** In a story packed with cool twists and snappy one-liners, every Skies of Arcadia fan can name a couple dozen favorite parts. But it's hard to top the impact of that moment right at the beginning, when the game's scripted opening segment ends and you finally gain control. But instead of appearing as a solo adventurer on the usual forested fantasy world map, you're behind the helm of a pirate airship sailing through schools of flying fish in an azure sky filled with floating cities and dungeons. If that doesn't put you in the mood for a rollicking pirate adventure, you're pretty much dead inside.

17

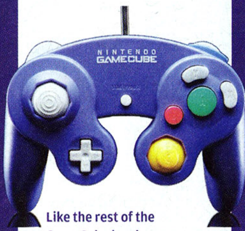
PRINCE OF PERSIA: THE SANDS OF TIME

PUBLISHER: UBISOFT | **RELEASE:** 2003

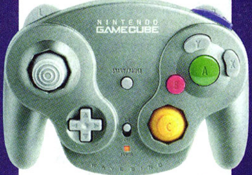
WHY IT WAS A MUST-HAVE THEN: The acrobatics and time-reversal component brought a new level of sophistication to the platforming genre, and the lavish setting served as an elegant backdrop to it all. **WHY IT'S A MUST-HAVE NOW:** It's still some of the best platforming action you'll ever encounter, and the visuals hold up really well. **THE BEST PART:** The game presents a nonstop stream of challenges that will test the skills of even the best platforming pros. By far the most thrilling moments in Sands of Time come from negotiating a series of traps and perilous leaps, scrambling up and along walls without missing a beat. There's no bonus awarded for doing so, but the elevated heart rate and feeling of "did I really just do that?" is reward enough.



YOU ARE IN CONTROL



Like the rest of the GameCube hardware, the system's standard controller was pretty traditional, but it featured everything you could want for playing a cutting-edge video game circa 2001: a digital Control Pad, two analog sticks (a first on a Nintendo system), four face buttons, and L, R, and Z shoulder buttons. Though the shape and placement of the face buttons (especially the X and Y buttons) has been a subject of debate among gamers, there's no question that the controller's ergonomic design felt great to hold.



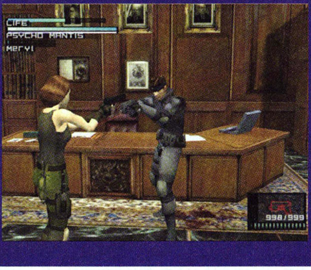
In 2002 Nintendo released a wireless GameCube controller called the WaveBird. Though similar in design to the standard GCN controller, the WaveBird harnessed radio-wave technology to create the first truly viable cord-free game pad. The WaveBird worked like a dream, and it set the stage to cement wireless controllers (such as the Wii Remote) as the standard of the gaming industry.

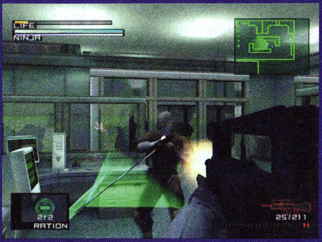
16

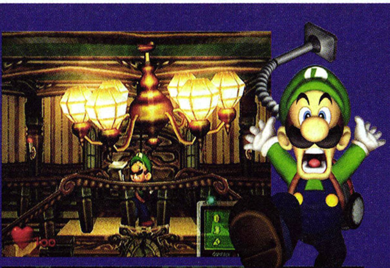
METAL GEAR SOLID: THE TWIN SNAKES

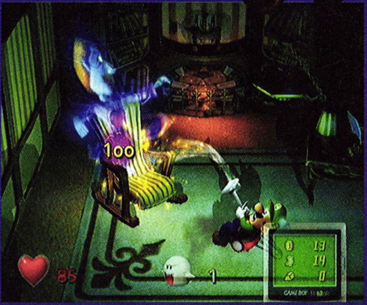
PUBLISHER: KONAMI | RELEASE: 2004

WHY IT WAS A MUST-HAVE THEN: One of the most acclaimed games of all time, the Mature-rated Metal Gear Solid, was enhanced exclusively for the GameCube. **WHY IT'S A MUST-HAVE NOW:** Upgraded Metal Gear games are en vogue these days, but this remains the most technologically impressive version of a seminal classic. **THE BEST PART:** There's a lot to love about The Twin Snakes—including its fantastic story and memorable characters—but perhaps the coolest part is Solid Snake's encounter with Psycho Mantis. The telekinetic boss uses all kinds of weird tricks against you—you're even forced to unplug your controller—and he employs "psychic powers" to learn about your playing habits and other gaming interests. He specifically mentions Mario and Zelda games (among others) if you have Super Mario Sunshine and The Legend of Zelda: The Wind Waker save files on your memory card.









15

LUIGI'S MANSION

PUBLISHER: NINTENDO | RELEASE: 2001

WHY IT WAS A MUST-HAVE THEN: You just bought a new Nintendo system—you simply *have* to buy the Mario game. (Even if it's actually a Luigi game.) **WHY IT'S A MUST-HAVE NOW:** For a 10-year old launch title, Luigi's Mansion barely seems to have aged at all. It still looks and sounds great, and while it's awfully short, it makes for a fun afternoon. **THE BEST PART:** In one of the early boss fights, a ghost baby shrinks Luigi down to a few inches tall, leaving him to fight the now-giant, screaming, rattle-wielding ghost baby from within its crib. To do this, you need to vacuum up and shoot toys at the apparition while dodging possessed rocking horses until you can distract him enough to vacuum up his heart. It's a delightfully bizarre moment in a delightfully bizarre game, and it was a harbinger of a generation full of Nintendo titles that would take popular franchises in unexpected directions.

14

BILLY HATCHER AND THE GIANT EGG

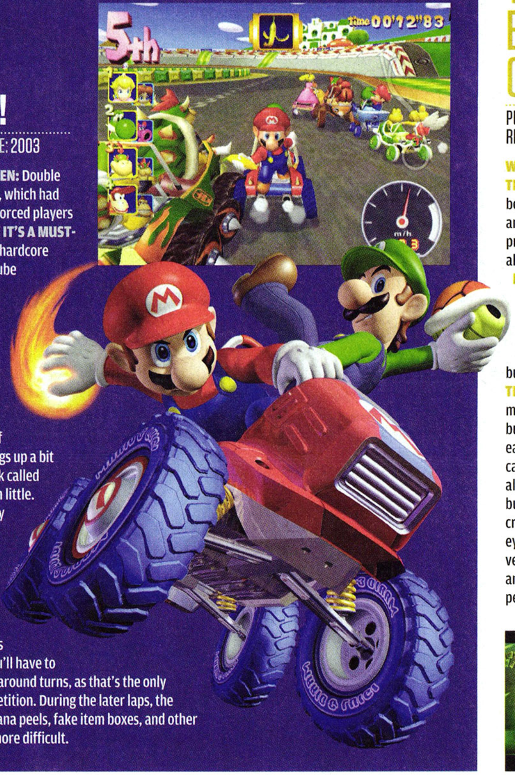
PUBLISHER: SEGA | RELEASE: 2003

WHY IT WAS A MUST-HAVE THEN: A Sonic Team adventure about a kid in a chicken suit? This we've gotta see. **WHY IT'S A MUST-HAVE NOW:** It's probably Sonic Team's best 3D action game. Strangely enough, it turns out that what they really needed to do was slow down. **THE BEST PART:** For a long time, Sonic Team fooled around with the notion of evolution in its games. The "A-Life" virtual pet concept birthed an ever-changing background for NiGHTS and a minigame diversion in Sonic Adventure. Billy Hatcher made some of those ideas part of the game itself—our hero gathers eggs, keeps their contents alive, and eventually they develop into different items and animal sidekicks. It isn't exactly on the level of, say, Spore, but for longtime fans it was very cool to see that design thread take such a different turn.

13

MARIO KART: DOUBLE DASH!!

PUBLISHER: NINTENDO | RELEASE: 2003



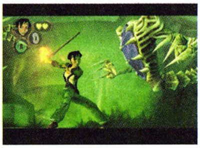
WHY IT WAS A MUST-HAVE THEN: Double Dash's new gameplay mechanic, which had two players riding on one kart, forced players to develop new strategies. **WHY IT'S A MUST-HAVE NOW:** Through LAN play, hardcore fans can link up to eight GameCube systems together for 16-player action. Sure, this requires some extensive setup, but the end result is worth it. **THE BEST PART:** The Mario Kart games usually have plenty of large, sprawling tracks on which to race. Double Dash!! is no exception, of course, but Nintendo mixes things up a bit with the inclusion of a little track called Baby Park. And boy, do we mean little. Inspired by Baby Mario and Baby Luigi, this diminutive track is a very small oval, making it the shortest track in the Mario Kart series. This might sound like a dull course, but it requires a whole different set of skills than the other tracks in the game. Over seven laps you'll have to master the art of power-sliding around turns, as that's the only way to stay ahead of your competition. During the later laps, the ground will be littered with banana peels, fake item boxes, and other obstacles, making things even more difficult.

12

BEYOND GOOD & EVIL

PUBLISHER: UBISOFT
RELEASE: 2003

WHY IT WAS A MUST-HAVE THEN: BG&E straddled the line between a Zelda-esque adventure and a Mario-style platformer, and presented a compelling, fantastic alien world to explore. **WHY IT'S A MUST-HAVE NOW:** This is easily one of the best games you've never played. For whatever reason, it was woefully overlooked at the time of its release, but it is an epic not to be missed. **THE BEST PART:** There are many memorable moments in BG&E, but one of the best comes fairly early in the game. You're exploring caverns as Jade, looking for a small alien creature to photograph, but when you find it the "small" creature turns out to be just the eyes of a monstrous beast. It's not very happy with your intrusion and emerges to put an end to your pesky existence.

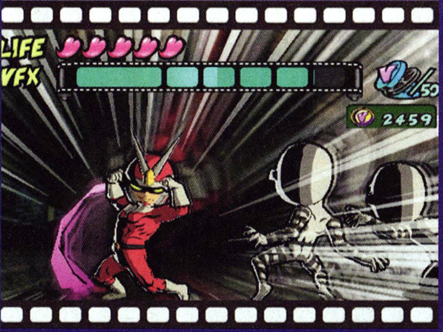


11

VIEWTIFUL JOE

PUBLISHER: CAPCOM | RELEASE: 2003

WHY IT WAS A MUST-HAVE THEN: Although it might look like your standard side-scrolling action game, Viewtiful Joe applied modern thinking to that genre's formula. **WHY IT'S A MUST-HAVE NOW:** The cinematic touches, crazy combos, and insane superpowers make the game fresh on every play-through. Slowing down the "film" to make helicopters crash? Genius! **THE BEST PART:** When you realize that every fight with every enemy—no matter how "insignificant"—is deeper than you'd expect. Dodging punches and landing counterattacks in slow motion is such a visceral feeling, and it simply makes you feel cool. In fact, pretty much everything you do in this game makes you feel like a superhero, martial arts master, and movie star all rolled into one—even if the dialog is often cheesy to the extreme.



10

RESIDENT EVIL

PUBLISHER: CAPCOM | RELEASE: 2002

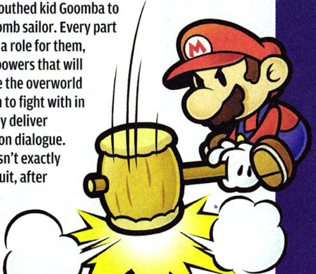
WHY IT WAS A MUST-HAVE THEN: The original PlayStation version of Resident Evil did not age gracefully, so this beautifully rerendered and cleverly remixed version was a major treat for series fans. **WHY IT'S A MUST-HAVE NOW:** Not only does it remain the definitive version of an influential classic, but this M-rated remake is widely considered to be the scariest entry in the series. **THE BEST PART:** "Wow, the mansion sure is pretty now! Looks like there are some new rooms and some new puzzles, but it's mostly just how I rememAAAAAHHHHHH! *Why are dead zombies getting up and lunging at me?!"* Ah, what Resident Evil fan could forget the moment he was first attacked by a Crimson Head, a new type of zombie that shattered series conventions by not just rising from the dead (again), but also sprinting after players at high speeds? This brilliant remake of Resident Evil succeeded in bringing more scares than the original by luring old-school players into a sense of security and then drastically changing the rules.

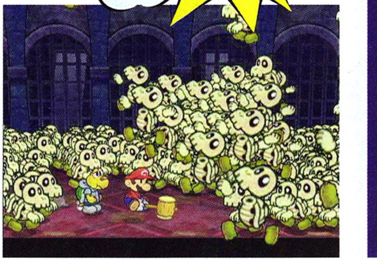
9

PAPER MARIO: THE THOUSAND-YEAR DOOR

PUBLISHER: NINTENDO | RELEASE: 2004

WHY IT WAS A MUST-HAVE THEN: More Paper Mario! We loved the original N64 game, and this was even better. **WHY IT'S A MUST-HAVE NOW:** Paper Mario proves that great art is at least as important as great technology. It still has personality like no other. **THE BEST PART:** All the Paper Mario games have lovable goofy sidekick characters, and this one's no different—it includes everything from a smart-mouthed kid Goomba to a salty old Bob-omb sailor. Every part of the game has a role for them, too—they have powers that will help you explore the overworld map, they're fun to fight with in combat, and they deliver lots of fun cartoon dialogue. Witty repartee isn't exactly Mario's strong suit, after all. He's lucky they came along to pick up the slack.





8

PIKMIN

PUBLISHER: NINTENDO | RELEASE: 2001

WHY IT WAS A MUST-HAVE THEN: It was Shigeru Miyamoto's first GameCube project, and it was unlike anything he'd ever made. **WHY IT'S A MUST-HAVE NOW:** It's a real-time strategy game that works on a console. Even now, just how many of those can you find? **THE BEST PART:** Early in the game, the big, clomping, stomping alien bugs are genuinely frightening. It's a testament to the way Pikmin conveys a sense of scale—the big guys really do feel big, and they're pretty darned scary because of it. That just sets up the most satisfying moments of the adventure, when a well-commanded crew of little plant-soldiers team up to bring down something huge. Even in a cutesy, primary-colored alien garden, revenge is sweet.

x 057 / 056
day
1

x 045 / 079
day
1

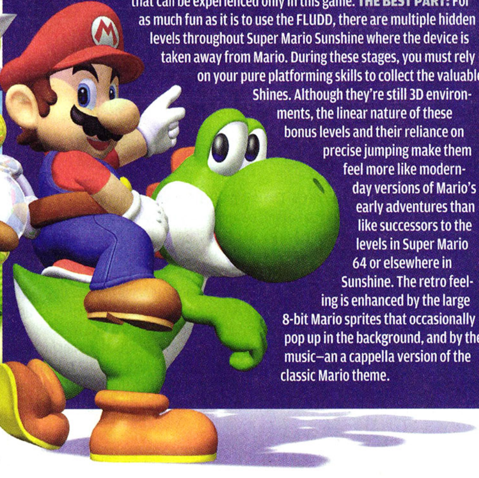
x00
x01
WATER

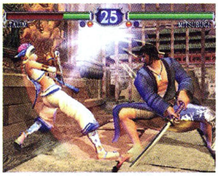
7

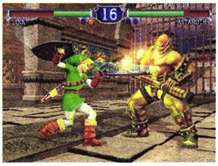
SUPER MARIO SUNSHINE

PUBLISHER: NINTENDO | RELEASE: 2002

WHY IT WAS A MUST-HAVE THEN: When Sunshine was released, it had been six years since Super Mario 64. Nobody could say no to a new Mario platformer after all that time! **WHY IT'S A MUST-HAVE NOW:** Mario's water-spouting backpack, the FLUDD, allows the plumber to maneuver through worlds in ways that can be experienced only in this game. **THE BEST PART:** For as much fun as it is to use the FLUDD, there are multiple hidden levels throughout Super Mario Sunshine where the device is taken away from Mario. During these stages, you must rely on your pure platforming skills to collect the valuable Shines. Although they're still 3D environments, the linear nature of these bonus levels and their reliance on precise jumping make them feel more like modern-day versions of Mario's early adventures than like successors to the levels in Super Mario 64 or elsewhere in Sunshine. The retro feeling is enhanced by the large 8-bit Mario sprites that occasionally pop up in the background, and by the music—an a cappella version of the classic Mario theme.







6

SOUL CALIBUR II

PUBLISHER: NAMCO
RELEASE: 2003

WHY IT WAS A MUST-HAVE THEN: The GameCube version of Soul Calibur II features a fantastic exclusive character—Link from the Legend of Zelda series. **WHY IT'S A MUST-HAVE NOW:** Even today, this is one of the best fighting games around. It's even arguably better than any of its sequels. Also, you can totally play as Link. **THE BEST PART:** An outstanding fighting game, Soul Calibur II is an exemplary two-player experience. (Getting together with a friend to pummel each other silly is a great way to kill a few hours.) However, Soul Calibur II does something that a lot of fighting games forget—it also delivers a terrific single-player experience. The lengthy Weapon Master mode allows you to take each character through a unique adventure, fighting in a series of battles that usually have specific conditions attached to them (your health may be constantly dwindling or you may be limited to only throws, for instance). While completing these objectives, you can earn cash or (even better) new weapons that boost your fighter's power. Oh, and did we mention that you can play as Link?

5

METROID PRIME

PUBLISHER: NINTENDO | RELEASE: 2002

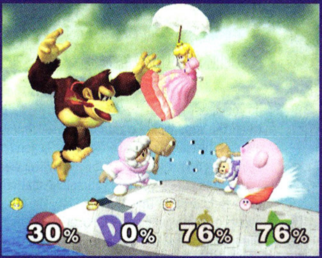
WHY IT WAS A MUST-HAVE THEN: After eight years, Metroid returned to life—in three dimensions, no less. We never believed it could work, but it did. **WHY IT'S A MUST-HAVE NOW:** Many classic games have tried to make the 3D leap. Years later, none have done it so smoothly as Metroid Prime. **THE BEST PART:** Emerging from a tunnel into the snowdrifts of Phendrana is one of those moments that call for sitting back in awe. It's a basic, familiar concept at heart—the "ice level" we've seen in so many games—yet the visual effects and the haunting music help mold it into something unique. Moments like this make Prime more than a great game—it's great science fiction and a real feat of world-building. Don't sit back and admire it too long, though, or the hordes of baby Sheegoths will eat you.

4

SUPER SMASH BROS. MELEE

PUBLISHER: NINTENDO | RELEASE: 2001

WHY IT WAS A MUST-HAVE THEN: The original Super Smash Bros. on the N64 was a great game, but this sequel improved on it in every way. **WHY IT'S A MUST-HAVE NOW:** Although there's now a sequel on the market (the also-excellent Super Smash Bros. Brawl for Wii), some die-hard fans still contend that Melee is the better fighter. **THE BEST PART:** Multiplayer—duh! With support for up to four simultaneous combatants, there are few things more fun than getting together with a group of friends, plugging in four controllers, and beating the snot out of each other. The wide variety of battlegrounds forces everyone to constantly alter their fighting strategies, and the roster of iconic characters adds tons of personality to each match. Let's not forget the ample smack-talking that's bound to occur when you put your buddy's fully armored Samus to sleep with Jigglypuff's Sing move before knocking the bounty hunter out of the ring. We are not at all surprised to see people who have put dozens, if not hundreds, of hours into Melee's Vs. mode.

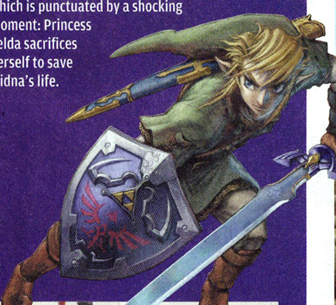


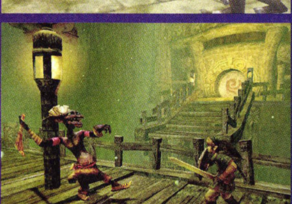
3

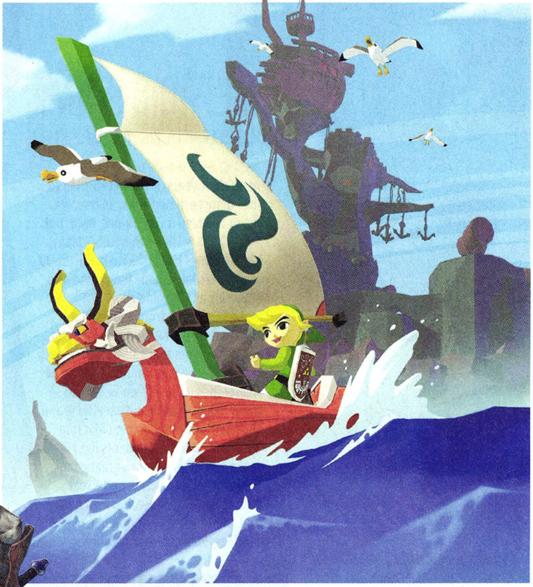
THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: TWILIGHT PRINCESS

PUBLISHER: NINTENDO | RELEASE: 2006

WHY IT WAS A MUST-HAVE THEN: This was the Zelda game that the fans had been waiting for, with killer graphics and a massive quest. **WHY IT'S A MUST-HAVE NOW:** At the time of its release, it was overshadowed by the Wii version. Die-hard Zelda fans will want both, however—the world in the GameCube version is a mirror image of the Wii world, so it's sort of like a second quest. **THE BEST PART:** Twilight Princess has a lot of highlights, but the most memorable part happens about a third of the way through the game. After being attacked by Zant, Midna is almost killed and Link is trapped in wolf form, forcing you to use what little strength you have left to retreat to Hyrule Castle. Somber yet beautiful music plays as you make the trek, which is punctuated by a shocking moment: Princess Zelda sacrifices herself to save Midna's life.







2

THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: THE WIND WAKER

PUBLISHER: NINTENDO | RELEASE: 2003

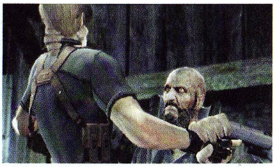
WHY IT WAS A MUST-HAVE THEN: It was The Legend of Zelda's GameCube debut—what more do you need? **WHY IT'S A MUST-HAVE NOW:** The cartoony visual style was very controversial when The Wind Waker was first released, but it has held up amazingly well. The Wind Waker also set the stage for the DS titles The Legend of Zelda: Phantom Hourglass and The Legend of Zelda: Spirit Tracks. **THE BEST PART:** After claiming three magical pearls and conquering the Tower of the Gods, you find yourself beneath the waves in a strange but familiar place. That place is none other than the fabled Hyrule Castle, and you soon learn that sometime after the events of The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time, the entire realm had to be abandoned to halt the spread of evil. Not only was it awesome to return to Hyrule, but prior to this revelation, continuity in the Zelda series was understated at best. Additionally, this occurrence ties The Wind Waker directly to one of the most beloved Zelda titles in a very dramatic way.

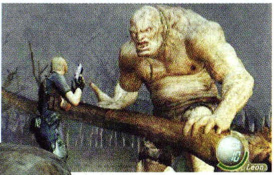
1

RESIDENT EVIL 4

PUBLISHER: CAPCOM | **RELEASE:** 2005

WHY IT WAS A MUST-HAVE THEN: It was an exclusive Resident Evil sequel helmed by series creator Shinji Mikami, and it promised to reinvent the entire series. **WHY IT'S A MUST-HAVE NOW:** Resident Evil 4 was a landmark release that had a tremendous influence on third-person action games and is still regarded as both the Resident Evil series's finest hour and one of the greatest games of all time. **THE BEST PART:** Early in the M-rated game, Leon encounters a wolf caught in a bear trap. You can free the animal if you want, or leave it be; the game doesn't seem to care. But a few hours later, when you're battling the massive El Gigante—an incredibly cool boss in its own right—the wolf (assuming you freed it) will leap onto your foe from behind, providing a vital distraction to make a tough boss fight just a little bit easier. It's just one of the hundreds of small, perfectly executed, did-that-really-just-happen moments that make Resident Evil 4 the most memorable title in the GameCube library.





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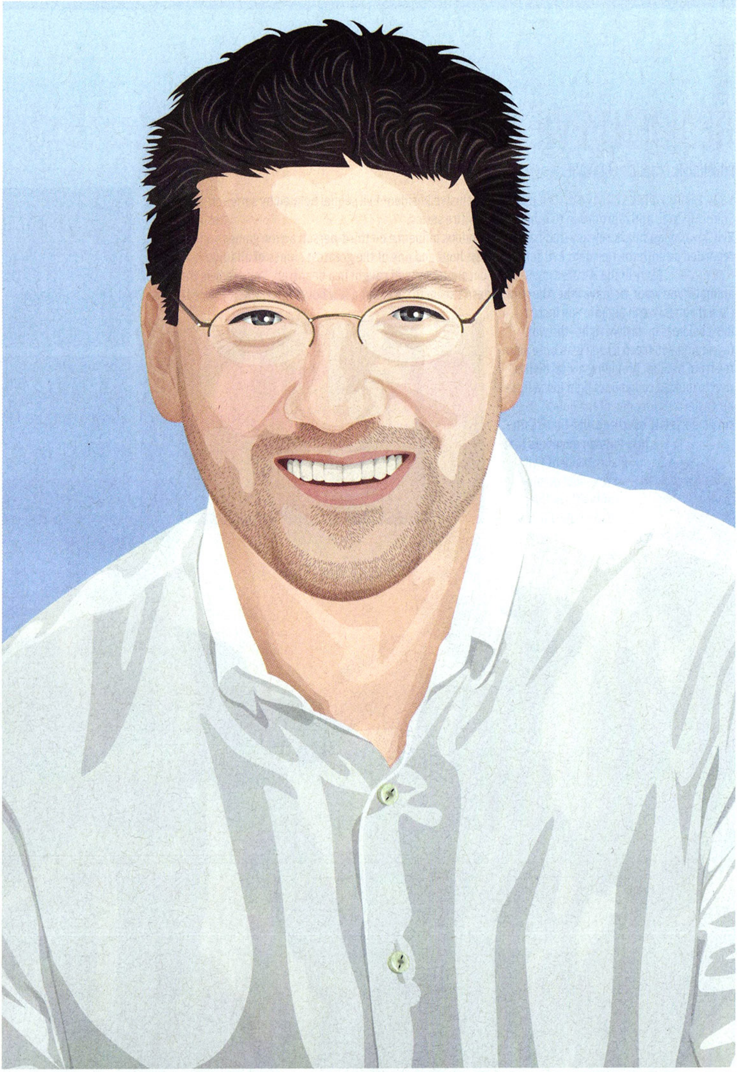
Power Profiles



DATE OF BIRTH
April 21, 1971

BIRTHPLACE
Fairfax, VA

POSITION
President, CEO, and cofounder of Gearbox Software

BEST KNOWN FOR
Heading the studio responsible for Brothers in Arms and Borderlands; disproving that Forever never comes

FAVORITE FOOD
Anything that serves as a good vehicle for garlic

CURRENT PROJECTS
Aliens: Colonial Marines

Randy Pitchford

ILLUSTRATION BY CHRISTINA EMPEDOCLES

Gearbox Software has established itself as one of the most prolific and respected independent developers in North America. The man responsible for shepherding the studio is Randy Pitchford, a 15-year veteran of the industry who cut his teeth on some of the biggest franchises in gaming. He's since helped Gearbox create a number of its own original properties, including the wildly successful Brothers in Arms series and Borderlands. Next up for the studio is Aliens: Colonial Marines—a Wii U version of which Pitchford and his colleagues are currently exploring. If we can use the controller's screen as a motion tracker, sign us up right now.

NINTENDO POWER
How did you originally get into the video game business?

RANDY PITCHFORD
I began making simple games as an amateur and hobbyist starting at age nine or so. As I kept at it, I got better. After college, I became a professional when I moved out to Texas in the mid-1990s and joined a studio called 3D Realms. In 1999, I founded Gearbox Software with several other partners whom I had worked with and had a lot of respect for.

When you were a kid, what did you want to be when you grew up?

I'm not sure I ever really thought about this question like that—I don't have any specific memories. I know I've always been compelled to entertain people. I've always liked solving interesting problems. I've always liked making things—creating and designing. Video game development is a great nexus of so many interesting pursuits with art and science blending together so elegantly.

As someone who works on both the business and creative side of things at Gearbox, which do you enjoy more? And do those different hats ever result in arguments with yourself?

As far as I know, I do not have a split personality, so I cannot recall ever having any arguments with myself. [Laughs] I am not very interested in the business side of things for its own sake, but see it as a means to enable massive creative efforts, so the business side is very important to me. Often, there are interesting challenges in business that are stimulating and gratifying to overcome. But creating things and being a part of the creative process and working with creative people in order to craft entertainment and experiences for other people in the world to enjoy is why I do what I do.

Many independent studios have fallen by the wayside in recent years. To what do you attribute Gearbox's longevity and success?

I always feel like we're just getting started. There is a lot that I'm proud of, but I also see all these areas where we can improve and where we're improving every day, and it's exciting to think about what we're able to do next. There certainly is a lot of hard work, the sum of generally good decision-making, and even a bit of luck involved in something like this.

Assuming all of those things are there, I think it's really about the goals of the people involved. I think there are many in the industry that see games as a business—that aren't personally more passionate about games than any other thing. For those people, games are a means to an end—they may imagine that they can make some games to make a lot of money and then use that money to do something else. For me, the nature and role of interactive entertainment and my ability to participate in the creation of it is not a means to an end—it is an end.

Your studio has worked on a number of big-name franchises—including Halo, Half-Life, and Aliens—but it's also created new properties like Borderlands and Brothers in Arms. Is that something you try to balance, and if so, is there a "right" mix?

There are a lot of really neat things in the world that other people have created—things we've been gratified to be a part of. There is also so much that is not yet done—opportunity for new creation and invention. I don't know what the right mix is, but I think it's important that we are passionate about what we are doing.

What are some of the unique joys and tribulations of each type of project—an existing series versus something of your own creation?

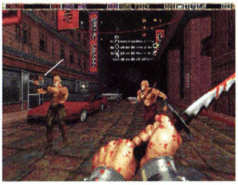
When you're working with someone else's property, it's a thrill to try to build upon it. You want to use it where it's great, but also have an impact on it—affect it for the better. You're able to look at the thing from the point of view of both a creator and a fan. Of course, the challenge comes with aligning your ambition with the interests of the people who own and manage the property. We tend to be precious with the things we give birth to, so we have to really trust the caretaker when we leave our children with them. It's up to the caretaker to earn and maintain that trust, which can be a challenge when you want to give the children new experiences. Is this analogy still working? [Laughs]

I remember at times having experiences with Valve and the Half-Life games we did where, on one hand, I'd have one of them—Mark Laidlaw, if I remember—hitting me with love and praise for his experience playing our Half-Life: Blue Shift game. He was able to play something that felt genuinely Half-Life but that was also new and surprising to him since he did not craft it himself. In another case, we had Gabe [Newell] from Valve trying to get me excited about a very specific way he imagined the opening of Opposing Force. It was a cool idea, but ultimately it didn't really contain anything that was specifically germane to the franchise, and we had our own ideas we were going to be passionate about pursuing. So we were gratified that he ultimately made the right decision to empower us to craft our own story and our own starting and

GAMEOGRAPHY

Pitchford started out working as a level designer on the Plutonium Pak expansion for Duke Nukem 3D. Recently, his career came full circle as Gearbox acquired and finished development on the perpetually delayed Duke Nukem Forever.

DUKE NUKEM 3D: PLUTONIUM PAK
1996, PC
LEVEL DESIGNER



SHADOW WARRIOR
1997, PC
LEVEL DESIGNER

HALF-LIFE: BLUE SHIFT
2001, PC
PRODUCER, LEVEL DESIGNER, SCRIPT WRITER

007: NIGHTFIRE
2002, GAMECUBE
EXECUTIVE PRODUCER

Power Profiles

ending point for Opposing Force that was built within the framework of Half-Life. If only all leaders could always be so wise as to empower the passions and interests of the creators they are leading.

Meanwhile, with an original creation, you have to remember what you're trying to accomplish and why accomplishing that is important to the world, because along the way you'll pull yourself and get pulled in a lot of different directions. When you're creating something new it can be *anything,* which is liberating, but also dangerous. It's really easy to go off somewhere irrelevant or costly or incorrect. Remembering the reasons why it was a good idea to start with is vital.

Gearbox developed Samba de Amigo for Wii, which was a bit of a departure from the studio's norm. What did you take away from that experience, and would you like to see the company take on other types of projects outside its perceived wheelhouse?
Samba de Amigo was a fun little passion project. In the Dreamcast era, we used to have Samba de Amigo competitions at the studio—it was great fun! We felt that Wii was the perfect platform to allow us to have that experience without having to bother with a custom peripheral and the floor pad and the wired maracas and all of that—you can just use your Wii Remote and have at it! It was also a great opportunity for us to do something on Wii that was really tailored to the platform.

We *love* Wii and really wanted to try something on the platform when we were first briefed about it by Nintendo. But most of our other games aren't really optimal for the unique interface that Wii brings to the table. In talking with our partners at Sega, we were really gratified that they trusted us to do [Samba].

When we visited your office a couple of years ago, you had an impressive collection of video game hardware on display. Is it safe to say that you're an avid collector of gaming paraphernalia?
I do have my old game consoles and handhelds and other things along those lines on display in my office, but I'm not really a collector. It's really about memories for me, rather than trying to collect things just to possess them. They're on display in my office because I like...seeing the entire span of the home video game industry in front of me every day. It puts a perspective on things. I've had such fond memories and experiences with each system, and I can see the progression of design and art and technology in a very simple but also profound way when I look around my office.

> "When you're creating something new, it can be anything, which is liberating, but also dangerous."

Frequently, I'll be working on a design challenge with one of our games and can find the solution from a memory triggered by looking at, say, my old 8-bit NES and remembering, say, the slot-machine game I was able to play between levels in Super Mario Brothers 2. That kind of thing happens to me all the time.

What aspect of the video game development process do you enjoy the most?
I enjoy working with teams of creative people where we're all feeding into each other's value. I enjoy seeing that collaboration result in something tangible that we can experience. I enjoy sending the creation off into the world to be experienced by lots of people. I enjoy the sense of gratification that we get when we've done a great job and have entertained people. I enjoy the lessons I learn and the opportunity for improvement I get from the feedback that comes from all efforts.

Do you consider video games to be art?
Most video games are commercial art. Some video games are expression art. Just like in film, there is a spectrum between *Citizen Kane* and a Super Bowl commercial. There is a spectrum in interactive entertainment between expression, commercialism, entertainment, and interactive engagement. The fact that one can see the ends of the spectrum and that the ends can always be pushed further is just more evidence that, like those other mediums, video games are, undeniably and unequivocally, art.

If you weren't making video games, what do you think you'd be doing?
I would be doing something that involved entertainment. Before I became a professional game-maker, I was a professional magician. It was quite a lot of fun, and I learned a lot entertaining people with magic that I still apply today when making video games.

Whose works in other forms of media, such as film or literature, do you most admire or enjoy?
In literature, Jane Austen is who I consider to be the most expert at storytelling. The fact that her subject matter tends to be so far from my personal interests is just strong testimony to her skill. In music, I tend to like to call out The Rolling Stones. The thing I admire about them is more than just the great music, but the fact that they have committed to one another and to their music for so long. Even The Beatles ultimately failed because they could not remember that they were better as a team than as individuals.

If you could have one superpower, what would it be?
I want an extra sense that is hyper-tuned in to the production, consumption, and effect of dopamine, serotonin, and endorphin in the people I want to focus on. I promise I would only use this power for good.

GAMEOGRAPHY

BROTHERS IN ARMS: DOUBLE TIME
2008, Wii
EXECUTIVE PRODUCER, GAME DESIGNER

SAMBA DE AMIGO
2008, Wii
EXECUTIVE PRODUCER

BORDERLANDS
2009, PLAYSTATION 3/XBOX 360
EXECUTIVE PRODUCER, GAME DESIGNER, WRITER

ALIENS: COLONIAL MARINES
TBA, Wii U
EXECUTIVE PRODUCER, GAME DESIGNER

Because the **Andersons** play video games, there's a system in place to make sure they **bring home the right ones.** This is how that system works: First, Mom and Dad select games using the ratings on the box. Step two, everyone gets a controller. Step three, the **kids win.** This quality time is presented by the **ESRB.**

EVERYONE
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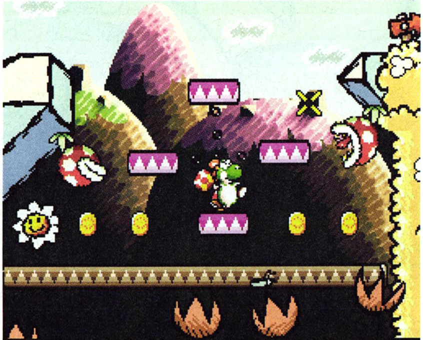
Super Mario World 2: Yoshi's Island

Despite the game's title, this isn't Mario World—but it's still super.

Super Mario World 2
Yoshi's Island
Only for Nintendo
Super Nintendo Entertainment System

PLATFORM: **SUPER NES**
PUBLISHER: **NINTENDO**
DEVELOPER: **NINTENDO**
RELEASE DATE: **OCTOBER 1995**
COVERED IN ISSUES: **74, 75, 77, 79, 80, 81, 82, 87**
NUMBER OF DIAPER CHANGES OVER 54 STAGES: **0**



Despite the inclusion of familiar enemies such as Piranha Plants, Yoshi's Island stands apart from the rest of the Super Mario series.

Of the countless video game reviews I've written in the past two decades, I regret only one—Super Mario World 2: Yoshi's Island. I gave the game a solid score equivalent to a 7.5, but over the years those remaining 2.5 points have loomed ever larger as subsequent replays have proven Yoshi's Island to be a treasured classic.

I lay a small part of the blame upon the misleading "Super Mario World 2" moniker—the game is nothing like the original Super Mario World, and anyone who hoped for a true sequel to that beloved platformer was in for a shock. The quick tempo and snappy acrobatics expected of a Super Mario title are nowhere to be found. Instead there's a more plodding pace with egg-throwing, enemy-eating, and a new primary goal: keep the bad guys from stealing Baby Mario from Yoshi's saddle. But judged on its own merits, Yoshi's Island is an incredible game. Snaring enemies with Yoshi's tongue is as fun as always, and the timing-based gameplay mechanic of aiming Yoshi's egg attack is endlessly satisfying.

One of the game's most distinctive qualities is its unique visual style: it looks as if it was lifted from a children's storybook. It took me a while to warm up to the approach—it wasn't as technically impressive as the groundbreaking prerendered graphics in Donkey Kong Country from the year before, and the then-impending release of the Nintendo 64 console made everything on the Super NES look dated. But if I could warp back to 1995, I'd crack a big, spotted egg on the head of my younger self and open his eyes to the rare charm that emits from every warm and fuzzy pixel. Besides, it isn't entirely true that the graphics weren't cutting-edge: the game's built-in Super FX 2 chip provided some great 3D effects. And as a side note, it must be said that Yoshi's Island contains some of the best music ever heard on the Super NES—infectiously catchy tunes that I often still whistle without realizing it.

So, I'm sorry, Yoshi's Island, for taking 16 years to recognize your full brilliance. Your well-crafted stages, innovative gameplay hooks, and undeniable charm make you just as fun to play now as you were back when. Even by today's standards, you're a 10. —**CHRIS S.**

BABY ON BOARD

Since his debut in Super Mario World 2: Yoshi's Island, the tiny incontinent version of Mario has gone on to star in nine games, blazing new trails for what an infant can accomplish with a golf club, tennis racket, go kart, and more.

The little tyke even fought alongside his older mustachioed self in Mario & Luigi: Partners in Time, and in Yoshi's Island DS he reteamed with Yoshi alongside Baby Peach, Baby Donkey Kong, Baby Wario, and even Baby Bowser to rescue Baby Luigi from Kamek, the bespectacled, blue-robed Koopa wizard. But even though he has appeared in several very good titles, Baby Mario's first game is still his best.

HAVE A FAVORITE CLASSIC GAME YOU'D LIKE TO SEE REVISITED?
Send us your requests—we'll consider them for a future installment of Playback. nintendopower@futureus.com

Because Jess plays video games the ESRB (that's the Entertainment Software Rating Board) understands that some games aren't right for everyone.
Just like movies, every game has a rating. And those ratings come from the ESRB.

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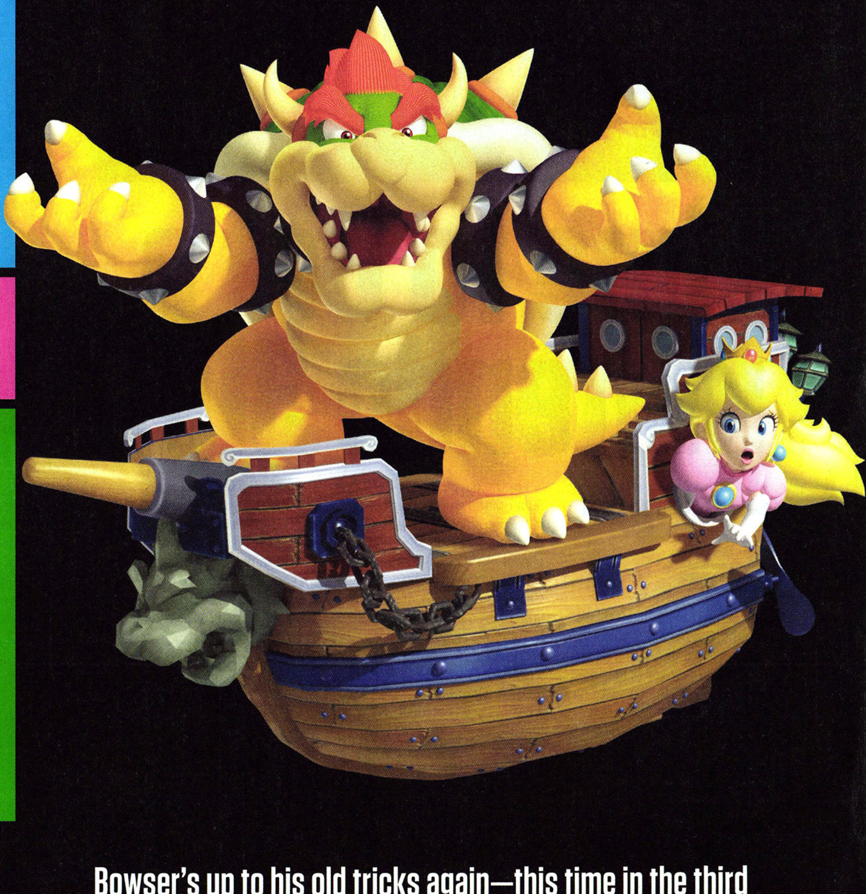
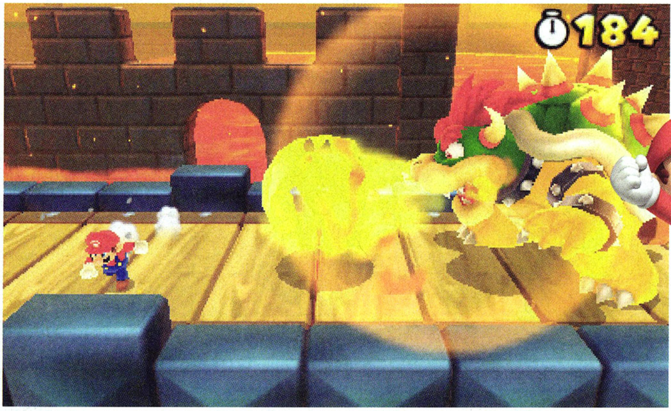


Bowser's up to his old tricks again—this time in the third dimension. Can Mario still save the day? (Spoiler: yes.)



Time to Get a Nintendo 3DS

SUPER MARIO 3D LAND

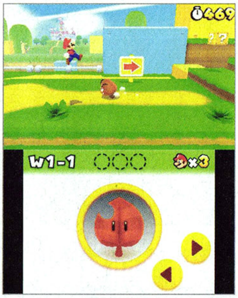
RATING: 9.0

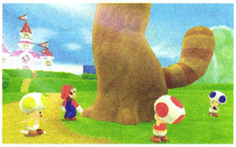
PLATFORM: **NINTENDO 3DS**
PUBLISHER: **NINTENDO**
DEVELOPER: **NINTENDO**
ESRB: **EVERYONE**

One of the many brilliant things about the Super Mario series is that it is constantly being reinvented. Although all of Mario's platformers are built on the same solid foundation of deft acrobatics and a whimsical spirit of adventure, they are often as different from each another as they are similar, changing to match players' evolving appetites and to better fit the unique qualities of the hardware that the games appear on. Never has this been more evident than in Super Mario 3D Land, a game that simultaneously feels like both a throwback to past platformers and something refreshingly new.

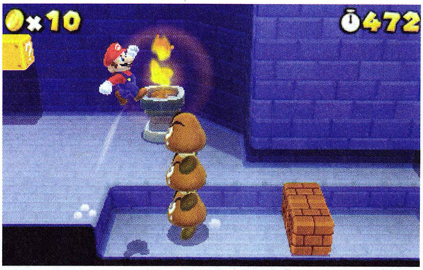
For the past five years, Super Mario games have come in two varieties—the free-roaming, three-dimensional play of the Super Mario Galaxy titles, and the straightforward side-scrolling action of the New Super Mario Bros. games—but in Super Mario 3D Land, both styles are cleverly woven together. The result is a game that, while perhaps not ideal for those who strongly prefer one kind of platformer to the other, has something to offer every kind of Mario fan: the short and snappy stages of Super Mario Bros. 3, the three-dimensional world navigation of Super Mario 64, and the friendly new-user accessibility of New Super Mario Bros.

Your initial impression of Super Mario 3D Land will partly depend on which past platformer you compare it to. The game's short stages are similar in length to those found in classics such as Super Mario Bros. 3, so they could come as a slight shock to players used to the meatier levels of Super Mario Galaxy 2, which took longer to complete and offered extra areas and challenges upon replay. But that doesn't mean Super Mario 3D Land is light on content. While many stages will fly by for skilled players who have saved the princess before,

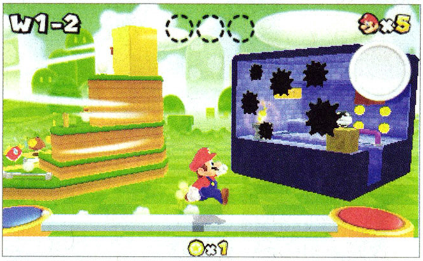




[Above right] All of the Tanooki leaves blew off the limbs of this tailed tree.

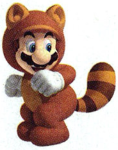


[Below] Cool dioramas represent each stage on the map screen.

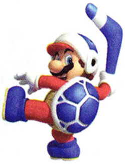


Suit Up!

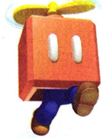
Any time Mario gets to dress up in crazy costumes, we get happy. He doesn't have many different duds to choose from this time, but each option is a winner.



TANOOKI SUIT
While wearing this fuzzy, full-body outfit, Mario can use the tail to float down from jumps and to KO bad guys.



BOOMERANG SUIT
This rare suit is pretty powerful, and its boomerang can land multiple hits. Its effect isn't dramatically different from that of fireballs, but we prefer it anyway.

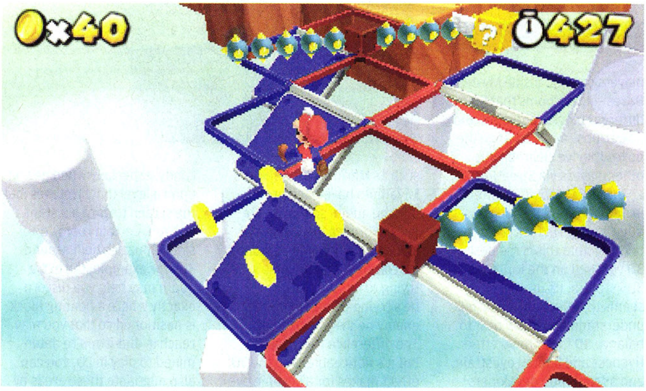


PROPELLER BLOCK
This item from New Super Mario Bros. Wii isn't really a suit, but Mario wears it just the same. With his head hidden inside the Propeller Block, Mario can fly superhigh.

there are a ton of them to play through before Bowser is truly defeated. We don't want to spoil what comes after the credits, but rest assured that the game is still far from over.

Many longtime fans will be pleased to hear that the game is cheerily reminiscent of Super Mario Bros. 3, with similar music, airship stages, bouncy Jump Blocks (the ones with white musical notes on them), and repeating battles with the former midworld boss BOOM-BOOM. The game's most significant nod to SMB3 is the return of the iconic Tanooki Suit, which no longer grants the power of flight, but still gives Mario a tail with which to trounce his enemies and to slow his descent while jumping. After the standard Super Mushroom, the Tanooki Leaf is the game's most abundant power-up, and it's easy to understand why. Lining up landings in three-dimensional environments can be challenging, especially on the small screen of a handheld system, and the slowed, floaty jumps afforded by the Tanooki tail are the perfect crutch for less-skilled players. Super Mario rookies will find the game to be very accessible in general, with a gradually climbing difficulty curve. Mario masters will breeze through the first several worlds, but they need not worry: there is plenty of challenging content for advanced players in World 8 and beyond.

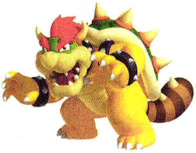
The stages—accessible via straightforward left-to-right scrolling map screens for each world—are nicely varied. The limited demo of the game that we were granted for last month's cover story raised concerns that every level was a simple side-scrolling affair, little more than New Super Mario Bros. with some extra depth. But the full suite of stages features a broad variety of approaches that, while never as explorable as those found in something like Super Mario 64, do include areas that require you to think and look around a bit. Extra brainpower is certainly needed to find and snag each level's set of medals, and as a nice little bonus,

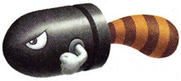


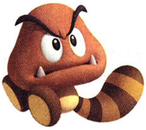
SCREENSHOTS HAVE BEEN CAPTURED IN 2D MODE.

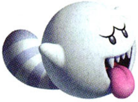
Pin the Tail

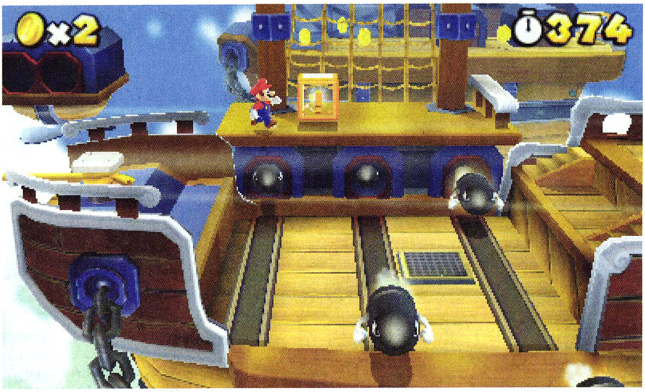
The entire game seems to celebrate the return of Mario's famous Tanooki Suit. Its iconic striped tail can be found attached to Goombas, Boos, Bullet Bills—even a tree!

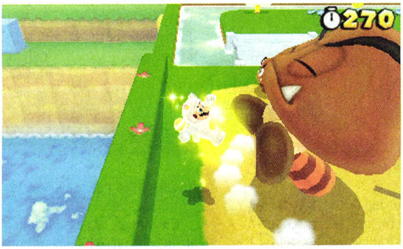


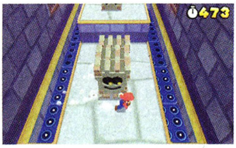




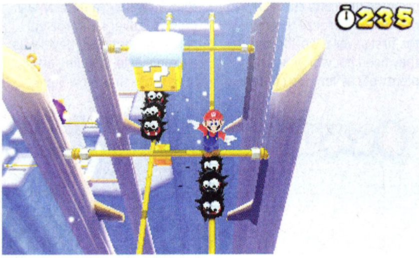








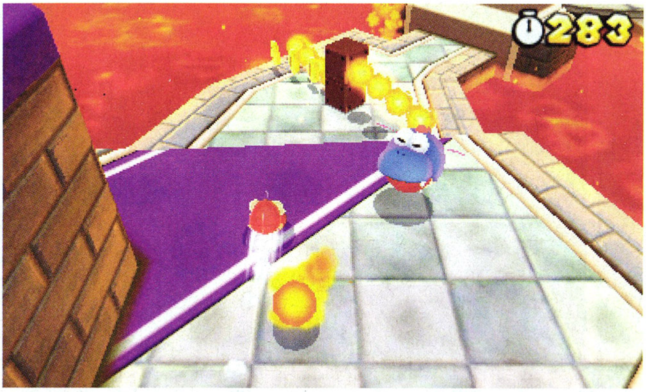
[Below] While walking across a tightrope, Mario can't stand still for more than a few seconds or he'll lose his balance and fall.



players can hop inside Mystery Boxes—small rooms that hold different blocks, enemies, and power-ups—and exchange the boxes they've cleared with other players via StreetPass.

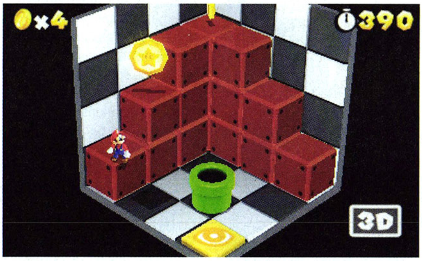
The stereoscopic 3D effect in Super Mario 3D Land is outstanding—in fact, it's easy to argue that this is the best 3D yet seen on the Nintendo 3DS system. Its use here seems to reflect an improved understanding of how best to balance 3D for optimal effectiveness and limited eyestrain, and as Nintendo developers such as Mario creator Shigeru Miyamoto have been promising, the added spatial awareness improves the player's instinct of where Mario stands in relation to the brick he's trying to hit, the platform he's trying to leap to, or the enemy he's trying to stomp. The difference isn't massive, but it's noticeable. And the 3D effect makes for awesome eye candy, especially when gazing upon a level that stretches into the screen toward a distant horizon. Certain rooms offer simple puzzles built around 3D—for example, the extra depth may help you discern exactly where a floating block is positioned so that you may reach it—but if you're determined to play in 2D, you can also negotiate these areas by shifting the camera angle.

What about this game *isn't* fantastic? Not much, although I could nitpick a little. While it is nice to see BOOM-BOOM again, I could do with a bit less of him—besides Bowser, he's one of just two bosses in the game, and you fight him in every world. Another small complaint is that all but the most basic of Mario's moves



Nice View!

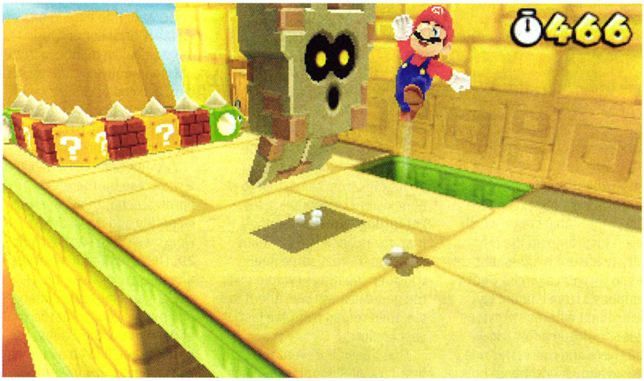
A special green set of binoculars found in many stages can be aimed with either the Circle Pad or the built-in gyro sensor to peek at the dangers and areas that lie farther ahead. Oftentimes, spotting Toad will cause something good to happen.



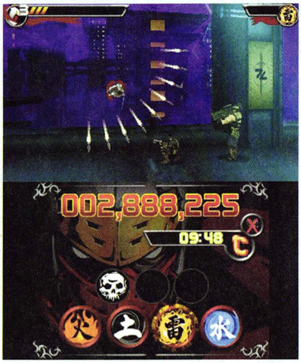
[Left] The placement of the blocks appear differently when seen in 3D.

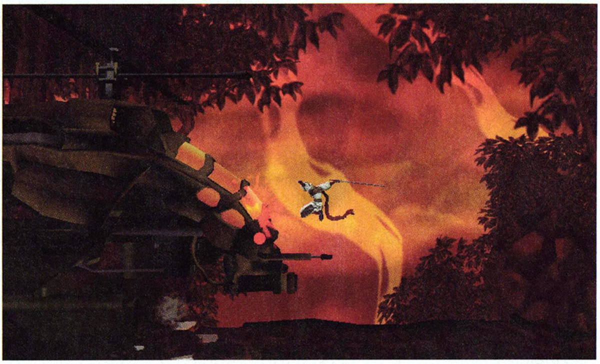
are totally optional; that is, the level designs don't require you to use them. This keeps the game simple for those with minimal platforming prowess, but it also means that pro players aren't called upon to strut their stuff, and stuff-strutting is the reward for getting good at something. This isn't a big problem, though, because expert players will undoubtedly revel in developing flashier, more efficient ways to traverse stages using somersaults, long jumps, and every other trick at their disposal. One final quibble is that, while it's fun to revisit the nostalgic elements from past games—most of them from Super Mario Bros. 3—Super Mario 3D Land doesn't introduce much that is entirely new (many of the same SMB3 components were brought back in New Super Mario Bros. Wii not long ago). The game still manages to feel fresh because of the way it's presented, but for Mario's next outing, some totally new twists on the classic Super Mario formula would be welcome.

Really though, Super Mario 3D Land is a true triple-A title, and as good a reason as you'll ever have for picking up a Nintendo 3DS if you haven't already. The game feels like a natural evolution of the Super Mario series, with nods to just about every installment that has come before it. It isn't as meaty as free-roaming titles such as the Super Mario Galaxy games, but it still boasts plenty of content, especially for a handheld offering. In fact, this game blows away all of the series's past portable entries in pretty much every way imaginable. —**CHRIS S.**



SCREENSHOTS HAVE BEEN CAPTURED IN 2D MODE.



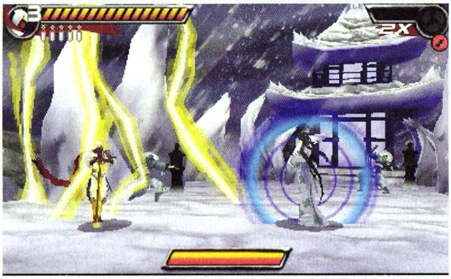


Die by the Sword

SHINOBI

RATING: 7.5

PLATFORM: **NINTENDO 3DS**
PUBLISHER: **SEGA**
DEVELOPER: **GRIPTONITE**
ESRB: **TEEN**



[Above] The flashy ninja magic comes in especially handy against bosses.

"Patience, practice, and perseverance conquer all." So declares one of the loading-screen messages in Shinobi, and I can think of no better way to encapsulate my time with the game. This Nintendo 3DS revival of Sega's classic ninja franchise is not for the easily frustrated or those who have grown dependent on the handholding in most modern titles. It's unapologetically old-fashioned, expecting players to put in time and effort to actually get *good* at the game. In turn, the sense of satisfaction for those who do is potent. By the end, you really will feel like a ninja.

There is, of course, a fine line between challenging and unfair. For the most part, Shinobi stays on the right side of that demarcation. As tough as things can get, the controls never let you down and all of the enemies follow a consistent pattern. Tasks that at first seem impossible will eventually crumble under your hard-earned prowess. The one infuriating exception is the game's final stage, which doesn't just ramp up the difficulty to absurd heights, but does so through a jarring shift in emphasis from combat to platforming. Whereas previous levels sprinkle in a few tricky jumps here and there, this one consists almost entirely of bottomless pits that require pinpoint precision to negotiate. The margin for error goes from razor-thin to nonexistent. After failing to get through the in level my first dozen or so tries, I finally resorted to what some might consider cheating—I would quit the game just as I was about to die, then reload from the last checkpoint.

That doesn't prevent the first 85% of Shinobi from being pretty darned entertaining, though. The journey is a diverse smorgasbord of ninja-fueled insanity—you ride the wings of a speeding jet, clash with a mechanical megalodon, and battle aliens aboard a space station while *Star Wars*-esque battles unfold in the background. The narrative supposedly tying all this madness together makes absolutely no sense, but it's hard to get worked up about that. (Besides, it sort of adds to the charm.) What's far more important is that the action has a nice flow to it. Our hero moves with the agility you'd expect from a ninja, and a well-executed parry system lends the combat some depth without slowing things down too much. Considerable effort also went into extending a fairly brief core experience; achievements, hidden Mystery Coins, a ranking system, and copious unlockables offer plenty of incentive to keep you coming back beyond your first playthrough.

Visually, Shinobi isn't exactly a showcase for the N3DS hardware, but the game runs smoothly and the art style works well with stereoscopic 3D. The soundtrack deserves unequivocal praise—it harks back to previous installments and pumps you up for the trials at hand. It's a good thing, too, because you'll need all the help you can get. —**STEVE T.**

WRITERS' BLOCK

WHAT NON-MARIO CHARACTER WOULD YOU ADD TO MARIO KART?

JUSTIN CHENG

Maybe it's because I have Star Fox on the brain thanks to Star Fox 64 3D, but I think having Fox McCloud race around in a Landmaster tank would be pretty awesome.

CHRIS HOFFMAN

A character from The Legend of Zelda series is an obvious answer, but rather than Link, I'm going with Midna. Naturally, her kart would resemble Link in wolf form.

CODY MARTIN

I would add Captain Falcon because of his extensive racing experience. It'd be hilarious to see him make the transition from high-speed hovercraft to karts, too.

CHRIS SLATE

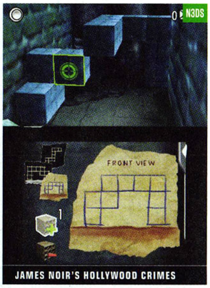
I've been enjoying both Kirby's Mass Attack and Kirby's Return to Dream Land recently, so I'll go with the pink puffball—especially if he could inhale the other racers right out of their karts.

PHIL THEOBALD

Now that there's a new Kid Icarus title on the way, I would love to be able to drive as Pit. Ooh! And there could be a Medusa power-up item that briefly turns rival racers to stone.

STEVE THOMASON

I'll go a little bit obscure and say Jill riding her trusty Drill Dozer. Everyone who gets that reference deserves a cookie and/or my undying love.



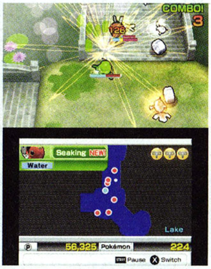
JAMES NOIR'S HOLLYWOOD CRIMES

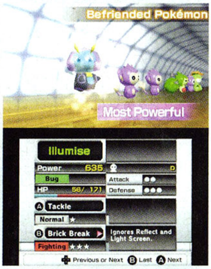
JAMES NOIR'S HOLLYWOOD CRIMES

RATING: 5.0

PLATFORM: **NINTENDO 3DS**
PUBLISHER: **UBISOFT**
DEVELOPER: **UBISOFT MONTREAL**
ESRB: **TEEN**

A puzzle-obsessed killer is offing former contestants of the fictional game show *The Incredible Puzzle Masters*, and your FBI-agent pal has asked you—a current contestant on the show—for help. With all the problem-solving you have to do at both the show set and the crime scenes you visit between TV episodes, your mind will be bent as you progress through this adventure, which takes place in 1961 Hollywood. It's a shame the puzzles aren't more varied, however. The structure of James Noir's Hollywood Crimes could use some work, too. Examining crime scenes is entertaining because the brainteasers are integrated with the investigation. The TV-show puzzles, on the other hand, feel like schoolwork. Worse, in these sections the host and his assistant say the same lines of dialogue over and over again. It doesn't help that the animations of the characters are weird. This title is like old-school full-motion-video-style games—à la The 7th Guest—only the developers decided to use looped snippets, animated GIF-style, instead of playing the whole video. Despite the subpar presentation, though, I was still invested in discovering the identity of the Puzzle Killer. Plus, the events leading up to the reveal *almost* make it worth slogging through the lackluster stuff. **—JUSTIN C.**





Rumble Pack

POKÉMON RUMBLE BLAST

RATING: 7.5

PLATFORM: **NINTENDO 3DS**
PUBLISHER: **NINTENDO**
DEVELOPER: **AMBRELLA**
ESRB: **EVERYONE**

Unlike traditional Pokémon titles, Pokémon Rumble Blast is a pure action game, albeit one with incredibly basic combat. Each Toy Pokémon can have only two moves, and the fighting engine boils down to rapidly pounding the attack buttons while charging at your foes. It may lack the depth that we see in the Pokémon RPG battles, but the simplicity is what makes it fun. Adding to the enjoyment is the need to "catch 'em all." Random defeated Toy Pokémon may befriend you and join your team, but you'll have to play through each stage multiple times to collect all of them. This randomized gameplay style is quite addictive.

A not-so-great instance of randomness, though, is the method for teaching Toy Pokémon new techniques early in the game. There are only a few instances when you get to choose a specific move for a Toy Pokémon to learn—the rest of the time, you're at the mercy of a random-move generator that eats coins as it hands down new skills. Learning a needed move can cost lots of hard-earned cash.

Although the battles tend to feel the same, Pokémon Rumble Blast makes some solid efforts to mix things up. In addition to the standard stages, there are special Team Battles in which computer-controlled Toy Pokémon provide backup, as well as Battle Royale arena fights. There is also a two-player co-op mode so you can get a friend in on the action.

At first glance, the game's visuals might surprise people. As you may have inferred by now, the characters in the game are not "real" creatures, but living-toy versions of Pokémon. The cute, stylized look is fun, but some fans might be disappointed after seeing the fantastic character models that appear in Pokédex 3D.

Pokémon Rumble Blast is a somewhat shallow experience, but the simple action and short levels make it a good pick-up-andplay portable game. Additionally, the 600-plus Toy Pokémon to befriend give the title a healthy dose of longevity.

—PHIL T.

COMBO!
13
189

Toying Around

SKYLANDERS: SPYRO'S ADVENTURES

RATING: 7.0

PLATFORM: **Wii**
PUBLISHER: **ACTIVISION**
DEVELOPER: **TOYS FOR BOB**
ESRB: **EVERYONE 10+**

Certain genres just work better with accessories. Music games, for instance, are more engrossing thanks to plastic guitars, drums, and keyboards. But action games? Your opinion of whether Skylanders: Spyro's Adventure is really enhanced by its light-up portal peripheral and variety of action figures probably depends on your age.

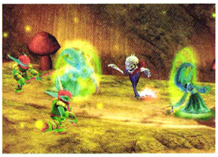
Set in a magical kingdom in the wild blue yonder, this title has players drawing on the powers of characters called Skylanders to defeat an evil wizard and restore peace to the land. These creatures—32 in all—come in the form of real-life action figures, three of which are included with the game. Place a tangible toy on a wireless portal, also included with the game, and the respective avatar appears in the digital adventure. As they're used, the characters level up and gain new powers, which, along with info such as custom nicknames, are stored on microchips in the figures. Players can take their figures to friends' houses, even using them with versions of the game for other consoles.

The Skylanders are classified into eight types, from Air and Water to Undead and Tech. Within the game, certain Skylander types become more powerful in different parts of levels, and there are gateways in each level that only specific types can enter. The game comes bundled with Magic, Tech, and Water Skylanders, meaning that although the game can be completed using these figures, there are lots of areas that are off-limits until players buy more toys.

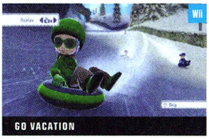
Unlike those of past games in the Spyro series, the levels in Skylanders are linear, and there's no actual jumping from platform to platform. In fact, apart from the character Spyro appearing as one of the central Skylanders and the fantasy theme, there's really nothing that connects this title to its platform-game predecessors.

As if the reliance on action figures weren't enough of a giveaway, the extremely easy difficulty level and Saturday-morning-cartoon-level story (which features some surprisingly good voice acting) make it clear that this is an escapade for the younger set. Segments in which players must use the Wii Remote controller to shoot targets are somewhat challenging, but mostly the game just gets easier as the Skylanders are powered up. You can enlist the help of a friend, who can place his figure of choice on the portal to use it in the game; that should help even the youngest gamers see the end credits.

Skylanders is cute and colorful, with an art style that lends itself well to the Wii console. The world is teeming with life and the characters are full of personality. The gameplay, on the other hand, is tired and limited. Switching characters doesn't do nearly enough to change things up, and there's a lot of the adventure that's inaccessible unless you're willing to buy more figures at $8 apiece. Even the core game is on the pricey side at $70. The overall package is one that only fairly young players with generous parents are going to really enjoy. —**RANDY N.**



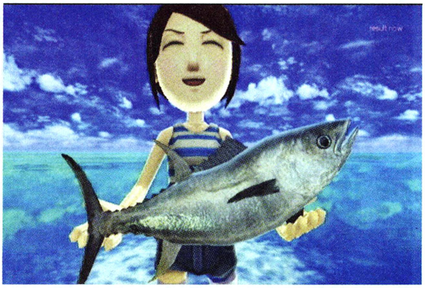
CAPTAIN AMERICA: SUPER SOLDIER



GO VACATION

Fry the corndogs!
N3DS

COOKING MAMA 4: KITCHEN MAGIC



CAPTAIN AMERICA: SUPER SOLDIER

RATING: 5.0

PPLATFORM: **NINTENDO 3DS**
PUBLISHER: **SEGA**
DEVELOPER: **HIGH VOLTAGE SOFTWARE**
ESRB: **TEEN**

Like Thor: God of Thunder for N3DS, this version of Captain America: Super Soldier takes a released-months-ago Wii game—which die-hard Captain America fans have likely already played or have long ago decided they had no interest in—and 3D-ifies it. Unlike Thor, however, Captain America suffers a bit in the transition to the stereoscopic handheld. The fisticuffs are still fun (if repetitive), but one of the best aspects of the Wii game was using the Wii Remote controller's pointer functionality to aim reflected enemy bullets and your shield throws. Because that functionality is nonexistent on the N3DS, you have to execute your shield's abilities via the touch screen, which is both less convenient and less accurate. **—JUSTIN C.**

GO VACATION

RATING: 7.0

PLATFORM: **Wii**
PUBLISHER: **NAMCO BANDAI**
DEVELOPER: **NAMCO BANDAI**
ESRB: **EVERYONE 10+**

Its outward appearance may seem kiddy, but Go Vacation is surprisingly deep for a minigame collection. To unlock games, you visit four different regions of Kawawii Island—snow, beach, mountain, and city—and try the vacation-themed activities that your guide recommends. There are 50 minigames in total, and most are pretty fun. Some even support accessories such as the Wii MotionPlus, Wii Balance Board, Wii Zapper, and Wii Wheel. Using ATVs, skateboards, and other means of conveyance to explore the island's open-world environment can be a joy, but only once you get the hang of the awkward motion controls. The movements required to go forward can accidentally change your direction, and the oversensitivity of turning is often irritating. **—CODY M.**

COOKING MAMA 4: KITCHEN MAGIC

RATING: 5.0

PLATFORM: **NINTENDO 3DS**
PUBLISHER: **MAJESCO**
DEVELOPER: **COOKING MAMA LTD.**
ESRB: **EVERYONE**

When Cooking Mama debuted on the Nintendo DS system years ago, it was pretty awesome—a smorgasbord of fast-paced WarioWare-style activities that turned the act of food preparation into an addictive gameplay experience. Numerous sequels and spinoffs later, the franchise has arrived on the Nintendo 3DS handheld, but I'm sad to say that the experience hasn't improved at all. While the hardware and the rest of the gaming industry advance, Cooking Mama has become incredibly stagnant. Sure, the food-themed minigames are still fun (albeit not very challenging), but it's all been done before; there's still no story mode or arcade mode to provide any structure, and a lot of the recipes are recycled from earlier titles. The 3D effects are wasted, too, since most of the gameplay takes place on the bottom screen.
—CHRIS H.

Sharp Anglers Only

FISHING RESORT

RATING: 7.5

PLATFORM: **Wii**
PUBLISHER: **XSEED**
DEVELOPER: **PROPE/NAMCO BANDAI**
ESRB: **EVERYONE**

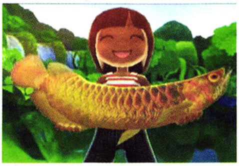
No matter whether you consider fishing games a classic genre or you don't care for the sport in general, it's still easy to see that Yuji Naka (cocreator of Sonic the Hedgehog) and his development studio, Prope, has successfully created a beautiful and surprisingly appealing fishing game.

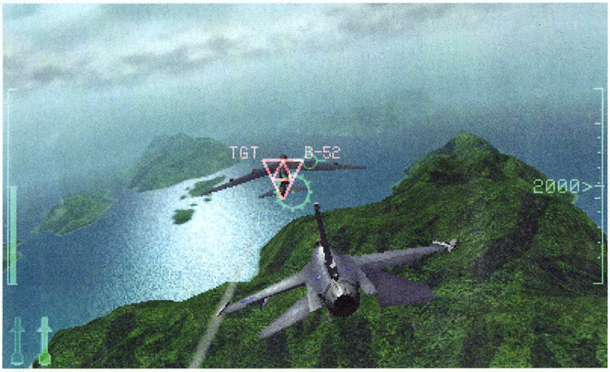
Starting out on a sunny ocean beach, Fishing Resort lets you meander around the moderately large location and drop your line wherever you can walk up to water. As you play minigames, manage an aquarium at the local resort, and accomplish small tasks for the other aquatic-life enthusiasts around the island, you eventually unlock additional resort locations to explore and fish. From shady beaches and placid lakes to sweltering swamps and murky marshes, each area possesses a natural, unique, and peaceful ambiance.

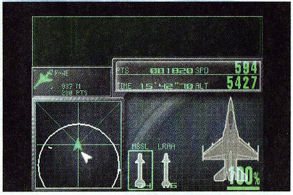
Battling a fish on your line and reeling it in is engaging, but the repetition of taking the time to travel to a specific location, prepare your bait, cast your line, and then sit and wait for a bite can be too long and boring for the brief and small payoff of actually catching a fish, especially when considering the short day/night cycle in the game—you're forced to head back to your lodgings when it gets too dark, and it takes much too long to get back to the angling. There is also a frustrating lack of information about your progress on the island, leaving you constantly wondering when you can unlock more variety.

You'll need a calm mind to tolerate the slow pace at which everything is presented to you, but you don't have to be a huge fishing enthusiast to enjoy Fishing Resort's eye-catching scenery and the addictive nature of the fish-collecting.

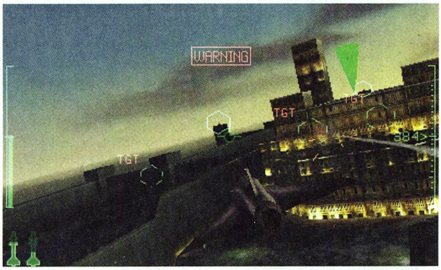
—DAVID M.







Aces High



ACE COMBAT: ASSAULT HORIZON LEGACY

RATING: 7.5

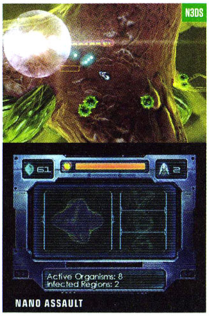
PLATFORM: **NINTENDO 3DS**
PUBLISHER: **NAMCO BANDAI**
DEVELOPER: **PROJECT ACES**
ESRB: **TEEN**

After going years without an Ace Combat title, Nintendo-system owners finally get to experience the famous series. And unlike top-down shooter Ace Combat Advance for the GBA, Ace Combat: Assault Horizon Legacy feels like the quintessential Ace Combat game—only shorter.

As part of the Allied Forces' Scarface Squadron, you are tasked with quashing a military rebellion in the fictitious USEA. Aside from the opening movie, though, much of the story is conveyed via dull expository mission briefings. (Your allies will sometimes tell you a bit more about the world and themselves during combat.) But the narrative isn't that important anyway; all you need to know is that there is a bevy of baddies to defeat across a variety of flight-combat missions. There are 23 Story Mode levels, but you can't give them all a shot in a single playthrough due to the forks in the story. Occasionally you will be given a choice between two assignments; you lose access to the ones you don't select, meaning you play only 18 missions—most of which can be completed in less than 10 minutes each on the Normal difficulty level.

It's not a lot of playtime, but this short-burst style of gameplay is ideal for a handheld title. Plus, there's a lot of goodness crammed into these relatively brief sessions. The game looks stunning on the whole (the natural environments such as the ocean and mountains more so than the urban landscape), and the 3D effect gives everything a great sense of depth. Additionally, just like the previous entries in the franchise, Assault Horizon Legacy really makes you feel like a badass pilot as you dart about and annihilate enemy craft while an epic soundtrack underscores the air-to-air and air-to-ground engagements. The attack and evasion maneuvers also enhance this feeling; sure, you just press Y whenever the yellow attack-maneuver gauge or evasion-maneuver arrows pop up onscreen, but seeing your plane rolling out of the way of an incoming missile or zipping right behind a bandit is pretty awesome—especially since performing the latter sets you up for unleashing a volley of missiles and machine-gun fire on a hostile.

Once you've completed a Story Mode level, you can play it again in the Free Missions mode. Replaying gives you the chance to earn a better grade and acquire money to spend on planes (there are 28 in all), engines, wings, armor, cockpits, and paint schemes you may have unlocked. In addition, there are four Extra and six Survival missions to try. Granted, these bonus modes probably won't hold your attention for long—and they certainly don't compensate for the game's lack of any multiplayer functionality—but they are better than nothing. Ace Combat: Assault Horizon Legacy may not be a beefy adventure, but because virtually everything that's great about Namco Bandai's long-running series is present here, it's well worth playing. **—JUSTIN C.**



NANO ASSAULT

X-MEN DESTINY

X-MEN DESTINY

NANO ASSAULT

RATING: 7.0

PLATFORM: **NINTENDO 3DS**
PUBLISHER: **MAJESCO**
DEVELOPER: **SHIN'EN**
ESRB: **EVERYONE 10+**

An offshoot of the Nanostray games, Nano Assault tasks you with piloting a ship around planetoidesque cells, collecting DNA sequences, and blasting malevolent microorganisms. Doing this is easier said than done, however, as this impressive-looking, one-hit-and-you're-dead title is primarily a twin-stick-style shooter, with the Circle Pad moving your ship and the face buttons firing your cannons up, down, left, or right. Being able to fire three streams of bullets at once and to widen your shooting angle helps counterbalance the lack of precision that comes from not having an actual second stick, but the controls still have issues. Fortunately, Nano Assault adjusts the difficulty level depending upon how you play, which can help alleviate the frustration. **—JUSTIN C.**

X-MEN DESTINY

RATING: 2.5

PLATFORM: **Wii**
PUBLISHER: **ACTIVISION**
DEVELOPER: **SILICON KNIGHTS**
ESRB: **TEEN**

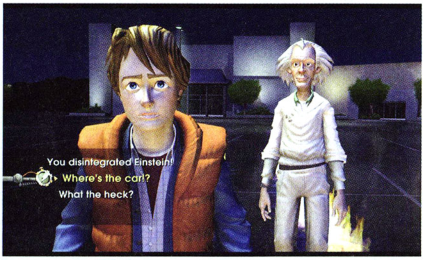
Choosing alliances and fighting alongside classic comic-book heroes as a young, unknown mutant sounds like a thrilling quest, but the creators of X-Men Destiny forgot to create a decent game to match the concept. What results is a flat and repetitive button-mashing slog through ugly levels featuring poorly animated foes, but the game can't even get the action basics right. The camera is a mess and visual glitches are common, standard enemies are brainless while bosses are overpowered, and checkpoints and health pickups alike are sparse, making deaths all the more frustrating. Developing your powers and picking a path through this mess just isn't any fun, even for Marvel die-hards. Sadly, X-Men Destiny's lone mutant power is the causing of anguish. **—ANDREW H.**

X-MEN DESTINY

RATING: 2.0

PLATFORM: **NINTENDO DS**
PUBLISHER: **ACTIVISION**
DEVELOPER: **OTHER OCEAN INTERACTIVE**
ESRB: **EVERYONE 10+**

The Nintendo DS version of X-Men Destiny is scaled down from the Wii release—it has just one playable character and simplified combat and progression options—and this original comic-inspired adventure lost its identity along the way. Aside from still-image sketches that explain very little about the story, the generic beat-'em-up approach doesn't do much to differentiate itself as an X-Men experience, and the mission objectives rarely amount to more than running around and hitting switches or punching out packs of identical henchmen. Worse yet, I hit nasty glitches that triggered a blank screen or a flickering, powerless hero. Guiding a new mutant's journey seems futile when the game is boring and half-baked. **—ANDREW H.**



Great Scott!

BACK TO THE FUTURE: THE GAME

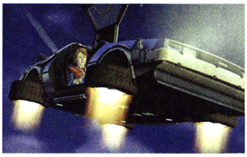
RATING: 6.5

PLATFORM: **Wii**
PUBLISHER: **TELLTALE GAMES**
DEVELOPER: **TELLTALE GAMES**
ESRB: **TEEN**

The adventure genre is a perfect fit for a video game based on the Back to the Future universe. Still, skepticism of a game's ability to capture the same magic of the movies is understandable, especially considering that it's been more than 25 years since Marty McFly and Doc Brown were on the big screen.

Shockingly, Telltale Games manages to pull it off, and the five-episode Back to the Future: The Game really feels like a fourth film. New characters fit in seamlessly with those from the movies, and the story (which involves traveling back in time to help Doc's younger self discover his love of science) expands the film franchise's mythos. Adding to the authenticity is the presence of Christopher Lloyd, reprising his role as Dr. Emmett Brown. Although Michael J. Fox doesn't return as Marty, his replacement, A.J. Locascio, does an amazing job as the time-traveling teenager (Fox does have some fun cameos near the end of the game, though). The voice acting is pretty fantastic all around, and the wonderful performances will have you feeling surprisingly sympathetic toward the game's villain as the story progresses.

The game delivers a great narrative and plenty of clever (if not terribly difficult) puzzles, but unfortunately, a few technical issues drag down the overall experience. A low frame rate causes the animation to stutter, and the backgrounds often look blurry and ugly due to bad textures. There are also frequent pauses when you perform an action or choose a dialogue option that disrupts the game's flow. There is a terrific adventure game here, but you'll have to tolerate multiple irritating quirks to get to it. **—PHIL T.**



Everybody Loves Rayman

RAYMAN ORIGINS

RATING: 9.5

PLATFORM: **Wii**
PUBLISHER: **UBISOFT**
DEVELOPER: **UBISOFT MONTPELLIER**
ESRB: **EVERYONE 10+**

Wow. I went into Rayman Origins with some pretty lofty expectations, but the game exceeded them in every way. It is a platforming masterpiece that all Wii owners should experience.

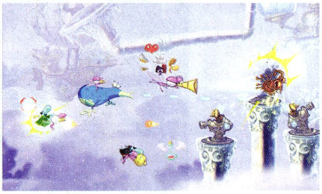
The first thing to jump out at you, of course, is the stunningly beautiful hand-drawn art. Every inch of the screen is saturated with wonderfully bizarre detail and bristles with little animated touches. Each of the game's heroes and villains moves in ways that convey tons of personality, whether it's oafish sidekick Globox hanging from ledges by his teeth or evil poachers bouncing their adorable prey like basketballs. The spirited soundtrack is equally inspired, amplifying the manic atmosphere with everything from didgeridoos to gibberish vocal melodies. There's just nothing about the game that's plain or boring. It has the infectious energy of a classic Warner Bros. cartoon as funneled through the gleeful hysteria that obviously pervades France's most talented development team.

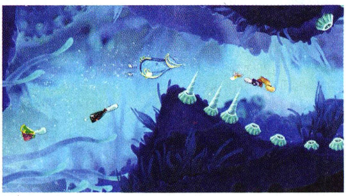
It's also a heck of a lot of fun. The action feels incredibly fluid and the level design is some of the tightest I've ever encountered in my 26 years as a platforming fan. Every single element has been purposefully and expertly placed to build a sense of momentum; to create a high-wire act that skillful players can run, bounce, and swing through without pause. That's epitomized by optional stages in which you have to chase a sentient treasure chest (which is justifiably terrified of Rayman smashing it) at full speed without making a single mistake. Plus this is the first time I've actually enjoyed playing time trials. The game just has an amazing rhythm; there's nothing else that feels quite like it.

Playing with friends only makes the festivities more entertaining. Up to four people can join in, and the execution is very reminiscent of New Super Mario Bros. Wii. If one player meets an untimely demise, he'll blow up like a balloon and can float (harmlessly) around the screen until another player pops him. That makes completing most levels considerably easier, though mischievous players can also smack each other around (leading to some great slapstick comedy).

Overall, the level of difficulty seems just about perfect. Most players should be able to reach the finale with a bit of practice or a friend's helping hand. Those seeking a stiffer challenge will find it by attempting to rescue all of the Electoons. That task requires you to pull off some pretty hairy maneuvers, and by the end of it you'll feel like a platforming deity. Either way, Rayman Origins offers a satisfying amount of content despite having started development as a downloadable title. There are ten worlds, each consisting of six or seven stages. Better still, the game does a remarkable job of keeping things fresh by constantly introducing new play mechanics and level concepts.

It all adds up to the best Rayman game ever made, and that's coming from someone who adores Rayman 2. Origins may even surpass Beyond Good & Evil as Ubisoft Montpellier's crowning achievement. I can think of no higher praise than that. **—STEVE T.**





HELLO
my name is
Chris

This is **Chris**, hardcore gamer. He's been playing games ever since he could grip a controller. When he was growing up, **his parents used the ESRB ratings** to choose the games that were right for him. One day he'll use the ratings to **decide what games his kids play** – he just doesn't know it yet.

MATURE 17+
M
CONTENT RATED BY
ESRB

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London 2012

London 2012
London 2012

London 2012

Summertime in the City

MARIO & SONIC AT THE LONDON 2012 OLYMPIC GAMES

RATING: 7.0

PLATFORM: **Wii**
PUBLISHER: **SEGA**
DEVELOPER: **SEGA**
ESRB: **EVERYONE**

This is the third time the Nintendo and Sega mascots have participated in Olympic events, so you should know what to expect from Mario & Sonic at the London 2012 Olympic Games: a minigame jamboree. But as with its predecessors, the teaming up of the two rivals from the 16-bit-console war goes a long way toward making this title more compelling than the typical minigame collection.

It also helps that a handful of the 31 events (21 Olympic events and 10 Dream events) are actually good fun. All of the contests may have fairly simple pick-up-and-play-controls—which take advantage of the various capabilities of the Wii Remote controller and occasionally the optional Nunchuk controller—but there is some skill required to be successful. Rhythmic Ribbon, for example, plays like a, well, rhythm game in which you follow the onscreen gestures. (That's not the only reason I like this event; I get a chuckle out of seeing the likes of Bowser and Dr. Robotnik perform rhythmic gymnastics.) Soccer, too, is one of my favorites—it plays like a simplified FIFA and makes me yearn for a new Mario Strikers title.

Like the previous iterations of the Mario & Sonic series, a big draw of this game is the various Dream events, many of which take some element of a real-life event and make them extra videogamey. Dream Fencing, for instance, is a four-player battle royale in which everyone attacks each other with foils. Of course, some events are completely out there, such as the Super Mario Galaxy-themed Dream Spacewalk, wherein a crew of four characters tries to take down the Dino Piranha as quickly as possible.

Sadly, as enjoyable as some of the events are, the majority of them are merely so-so. Fortunately, the London Party mode provides a compelling reason to play events you might ignore otherwise. Here up to four players compete on a board game-like version of London that is host to events as well as some mode-exclusive bonus games—including quizzes about Mario and Sonic characters—in order to acquire stickers and be the first to complete their sticker book. By giving you something to work toward, London Party provides some structure and makes playing bland games more palatable. You also have the goals of earning gold medals, completing challenges, and unlocking costumes for your Mii character, but these weren't a driving force for me. That said, Mario & Sonic at the London 2012 Olympic Games is a winner overall—thanks in part to the continuing awesomeness of the Mario-and-Sonic combination.

—JUSTIN C.

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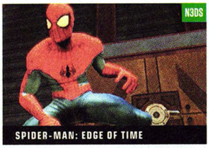
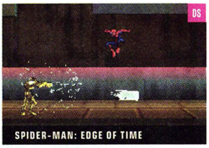


SPIDER-MAN: EDGE OF TIME



SPIDER-MAN: EDGE OF TIME

SPIDER-MAN: EDGE OF TIME

SPIDER-MAN: EDGE OF TIME

SPIDER-MAN: EDGE OF TIME

RATING: 6.0

PLATFORM: **NINTENDO 3DS**
PUBLISHER: **ACTIVISION**
DEVELOPER: **BEENOX**
ESRB: **TEEN**

Alternating between the classic old-school Spidey and the futuristic Spider-Man 2099 throughout this action-heavy romp yields some fun time-altering twists, but technical glitches and repetitive encounters deaden the impact of the creative gimmickry. Spider-Man: Edge of Time's slick production values are impressive; the flashy 3D and elaborate cut-scenes look and sound great. It's a real bummer that things fall apart in the heat of the action due to visual blips, game-freezing bugs, and audio pops. Frustrating camera controls open the door for foes to take cheap shots in battle, and they make navigating stages a disorienting task at best. On the upside, the third-person brawling feels tight, and both spandex-clad web-slingers pack cool moves that can be upgraded as you go. **—NATHAN M.**

SPIDER-MAN: EDGE OF TIME

RATING: 5.0

PLATFORM: **NINTENDO DS**
PUBLISHER: **ACTIVISION**
DEVELOPER: **OTHER OCEAN INTERACTIVE**
ESRB: **EVERYONE 10+**

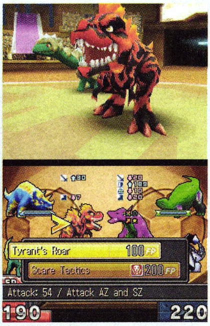
The straightforward blend of 2D platforming and brawling unique to the DS version of Spider-Man: Edge of Time has a few merits, even if it's not as enjoyable as some of the web slinger's past portable outings. Manually flipping between present and future Spideys to unlock doors and tackle obstacles adds an interesting puzzle element that gets you thinking about the spatial relationship between the alternate time periods. However, the combat lacks any real weight despite a decent array of moves. Delivering beat-downs to villainous foes just isn't very satisfying, and that's a major stumbling block for a series that has always placed a heavy emphasis on fast-paced melee battles. Spider-Man has definitely seen better days. **—NATHAN M.**

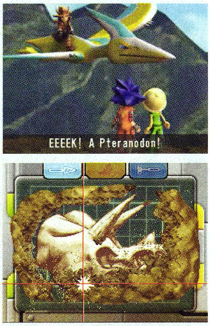
SPIDER-MAN: EDGE OF TIME

RATING: 7.0

PLATFORM: **Wii**
PUBLISHER: **ACTIVISION**
DEVELOPER: **BEENOX**
ESRB: **TEEN**

A hefty dose of transdimensional chaos kicks off Spidey's latest bad-guy-stomping adventure as he attempts to prevent his own demise. Alternately giving you control of both the classic and futuristic versions of the hero at different points in the game, Spider-Man: Edge of Time wields its time-travel gimmick well to make for some creative and comical encounters. With lots of moves to unlock between the present and future versions of Spider-Man, brawling through the game's winding stages is intense. Combat is fast-paced and punchy, and the Wii Remote and Nunchuk combo offers the best controls out all three Nintendo-platform versions. Some visual glitches and a few repetitive stretches made my spider sense tingle, but this is a solid outing nonetheless. **—NATHAN M.**





Everybody Walk the Vivosaur

FOSSIL FIGHTERS: CHAMPIONS

RATING: 8.0

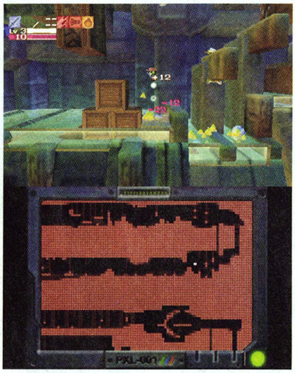
PLATFORM: **NINTENDO DS**
PUBLISHER: **NINTENDO**
DEVELOPER: **RED ENTERTAINMENT**
ESRB: **EVERYONE**

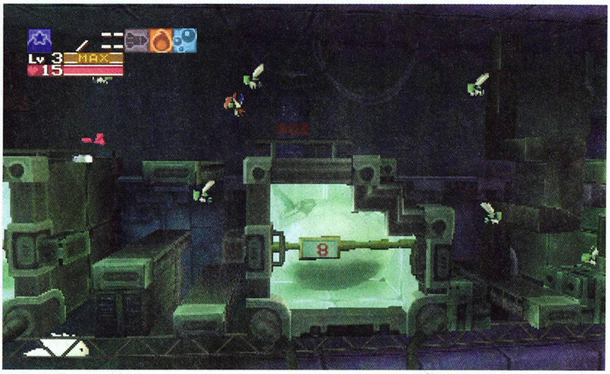
As is the case with many monster-training RPGs, Fossil Fighters: Champions casts you as a silent protagonist bent on winning a beast-battling tournament. Unlike other games in the genre, though, you aren't capturing creatures; instead, you're resurrecting vivosaurs from fossils that you've unearthed at various dig sites. What you excavate then must be cleaned by carefully chiseling away rubble with the stylus in a sort of minigame. It's a monotonous endeavor if you choose to complete your whole inventory in one sitting, but fortunately the fossil rocks come in different shapes, sizes, patterns, and densities to maintain variation.

Once you've brought your monsters to life, you pit them against other vivosaurs. The unique strategy employed in battles is certainly a refreshing change of pace from other combat systems. You control three vivosaurs arranged in a rotatable, six-panel circle formation. Each turn you're given a limited number of Fossil Points to spend on battle skills, and you're often required to shift your beasties to achieve advantageous positions.

The storyline is fairly straightforward, but it's lavished with enough action, humor, and cut-scenes to keep you amused. Since the plot is relatively short (12–13 hours of gameplay), you'll want to pour hours into the endgame's second competition, slew of side quests, and online multiplayer. You can also replay the story without abandoning your team of prehistoric pals.

Unfortunately, the challenge level is rather low; the experience may be too simplistic for some. It's also a shame that the beautiful and dialogue-rich cinematics are absent of voice acting. However, Fossil Fighters: Champions proves to be a worthy successor to the original Fossil Fighters. Everything has been polished and refined this time around (especially where graphics and battling are concerned), and the game is more robust than the series's first outing. **—CODY M.**





Third Time's (Still) a Charm

CAVE STORY 3D

RATING: 8.0

PLATFORM: NINTENDO 3DS
PUBLISHER: NIS AMERICA
DEVELOPER: NICALIS/STUDIO PIXEL
ESRB: EVERYONE 10+

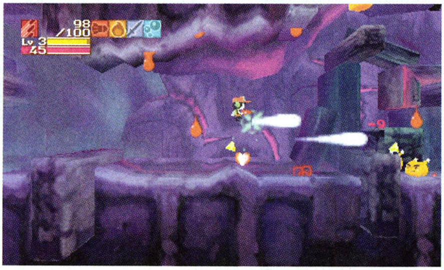
Like the 2D WiiWare and DSiWare versions that came before it, Cave Story 3D is an excellent action-adventure game that's bursting with charm, challenge, and old-school design sensibilities. Precision platforming, a variety of upgradable weapons, diverse enemies, an intriguing story, awesome boss fights—this game has it all (even instant-kill deathtraps!). As I mentioned in my review of the WiiWare title more than a year ago, the game boasts a great balance of action and exploration, and it's immensely satisfying to navigate each area and discover its secrets. It's impossible to see everything on offer in a single playthrough, and that's one of the reasons why Cave Story is a joy to experience again and again.

Of course, Cave Story 3D has other features going for it as well, most notably the complete visual revamp. The game's graphics have been totally rebuilt as detailed polygonal environments that take full advantage of the hardware's stereoscopic 3D capabilities. Each area looks so much more vibrant and alive that it'd be easy, at a glance, to mistake this title for an all-new game. The Labyrinth now looks like the run-down garbage dump it was always meant to; the Egg Corridor now resembles a technological wonderland; and you can practically feel the grit between your toes in the Sand Zone.

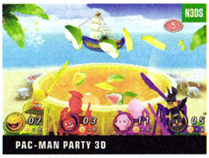
However, the more fleshed-out environs aren't without drawbacks. Load times now accompany every change in scenery, and the game world doesn't look as crisp overall. You may find yourself frequently checking the persistent map on the lower screen (which is an excellent addition) to determine if a platform is part of the background or not. In addition, some foreground elements can hamper your view (which makes some hazards harder to spot), and certain animations that looked fine in 2D—such as when characters smash through doors or walls—look weak in polygons. Fortunately, the gameplay remains true to the original despite the visual changes, and I certainly have no complaints about the remixed soundtrack or newly added levels. Though the handful of fresh areas won't blow your mind, they're solid stuff that fits perfectly with the rest of the game.

So is this the definitive, must-have version of Cave Story? Not necessarily. It's the prettiest and contains the most real estate, but when you can easily download the DSiWare version for a mere $10 (and the WiiWare version for $12), Cave Story 3D becomes a bit of a tricky proposition. Taken on its own merits, however, it is an absolute blast, and if you don't play Cave Story in one form or another, you're missing out on a modern classic.

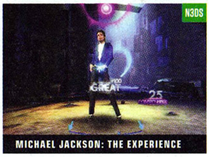
—CHRIS H.



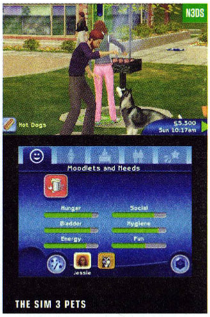
Do you want to rest?



PAC-MAN PARTY 3D



MICHAEL JACKSON: THE EXPERIENCE



THE SIM 3 PETS

PAC-MAN PARTY 3D

RATING: 4.5

PLATFORM: **NINTENDO 3DS**
PUBLISHER: **NAMCO BANDAI**
DEVELOPER: **NAMCO BANDAI**
ESRB: **EVERYONE**

A lackluster hybrid of Monopoly and Mario Party, Pac-Man Party 3D is—aside from the addition of the 3D effect—essentially the same game as its Wii sibling. You move around on a game board in an attempt to accrue a certain sum of cookies, which are earned by winning minigames and placing castles on the spaces you land on. Due to the lack of a timer or turn counter, however, matches tend to drag on longer than necessary. To make matters worse, the game's 50 or so activities are seldom satisfying, and the stylus controls can be frustrating. The music does sound slightly better than before, though, and it's nice that the game includes portable ports of Pac-Man, Dig Dug, and Galaga. **—CODY M.**

MICHAEL JACKSON: THE EXPERIENCE

RATING: 5.0

PLATFORM: **NINTENDO 3DS**
PUBLISHER: **UBISOFT**
DEVELOPER: **UBISOFT**
ESRB: **EVERYONE 10+**

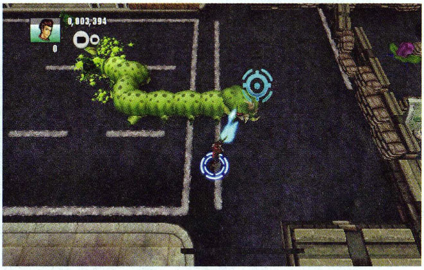
There are problems inherent to bringing console dancing games to handhelds—like, for instance, the fact that they just don't work as originally intended. On Wii, Michael Jackson: The Experience involves moving your body to the beat, but on N3DS it's about tapping and swiping a stylus. This sort of mechanic has worked really well in games like Elite Beat Agents, but just doesn't make for engaging gameplay here. The 15 included tracks sound great, and the virtual Michael Jackson moves like the genuine article, but there's no structure to hold everything together. It just feels like something to do while listening to MJ's classic tunes, not a fun new way to enjoy them. **—RANDY N.**

THE SIMS 3 PETS

RATING: 7.5

PLATFORM: **NINTENDO 3DS**
PUBLISHER: **ELECTRONIC ARTS**
DEVELOPER: **THE SIMS STUDIO**
ESRB: **TEEN**

If you've ever played a Sims game, you should feel right at home with The Sims 3 Pets—you create and manipulate a group of Sims, this time with cats and dogs included. Just like their human counterparts, your furry creations have their own wishes, personalities, and moods, and are fully playable. You can even have an animals-only family if you so choose. The overall experience has been improved since The Sims 3. For example, the refined controls make the game less cumbersome, the interface is much more organized than before, and there are more in-town activities to partake in. Sims occasionally glitch from one spot to another while in motion, making them hard to select, but it's only mildly annoying. **—CODY M.**



Slimy, Almost Satisfying

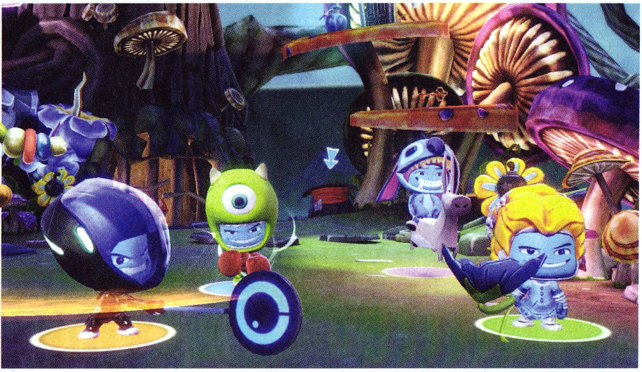
CENTIPEDE: INFESTATION

RATING: 6.5

PLATFORM: **Wii, NINTENDO 3DS**
PUBLISHER: **ATARI**
DEVELOPER: **WAYFORWARD**
ESRB: **EVERYONE 10+**

If nothing else, Centipede: Infestation does a nice job of straddling the line between retro and modern. The developers have updated a vintage coin-op by turning it into a fast-paced arcade-style pick-up-and-play co-op shooter that pays homage to its roots but doesn't get tied down by them. Like the original Centipede, this game is all about blasting bugs in confined environments, but now you're doing it with a decent array of weapons in a variety of settings, and you get to lay waste to numerous types of creepy-crawly critters with distinct behavioral patterns. There's even a cheesy narrative that keeps things interesting (and old-school fans will love the references to other Atari classics). Despite all the enhancements to the formula, however, the action is very one-note, and after a few levels it begins to feel rather repetitive, even when you're faced with occasional added objectives such as protecting an NPC. The game is also held back by its visuals. While the graphics are passable on the Nintendo 3DS due to its small screen, those same graphics look substandard when viewed via Wii. (On the other hand, the Wii version's controls are more flexible thanks to a point-and-shoot control option.) In both iterations, though, the cut-scenes are pretty poor; with few exceptions, they look like cheaply colored-in storyboards. None of this makes Centipede: Infestation a bad game, but with better production values and more interesting level design, it could have been a lot better.

—CHRIS H.



Not Quite the Happiest Place on Earth

DISNEY UNIVERSE

RATING: 4.5

PLATFORM: **Wii**
PUBLISHER: **DISNEY INTERACTIVE**
DEVELOPER: **EUROCOM**
ESRB: **EVERYONE 10+**

Disney Universe feels like the result of a Disney executive saying, "Those LEGO games sell a lot of copies. We should make one of those too." Indeed, this game feels an awful lot like the building block-based series with its simple platforming, light puzzles, mindless combat, and unlockable characters. The imitation itself isn't a terrible thing—the LEGO games are quite enjoyable, and the idea of dressing up as a variety of classic Disney heroes (and villains) while traipsing through scenes from some of our favorite Disney movies has potential. Unfortunately, much of that potential goes unrealized here.

The disappointment begins upon first glance at the main characters. These derivative avatars, with their small bodies, large squared heads, and wide grins remind us more of LittleBigPlanet's Sackboy than of Disney's beloved properties. Despite the questionable characters, the gameplay doesn't seem bad...at first. Each level is broken up into three small segments, keeping the action focused. When enemies appear, they tend a swarm the player, providing plenty of fodder to pummel. After a stage or two, though, the formula begins to wear. When every bad guy simply charges straight at you, the resulting combat is unsatisfying. It's also way too easy to lose track of your health meter during battle (it's a small ring around the character's feet), leading to plenty of surprise deaths.

Likewise, the puzzles tend to become boring. Instead of cleverly designed stages and situations, the goals are along the lines of "drag this item to the other side of the stage; now carry this item back." There is no feeling of accomplishment—just a growing sense of tedium as you complete each chore. It doesn't help that all of the playable characters have the exact same set of moves. With no variable skills to mix things up, there is no reason to swap to a different persona.

In addition to the overarching problems, there are a few minor irritations. The occasional vehicles that must be piloted control very poorly, making it unnecessarily difficult to aim the devices' weapons. The power-up system is also annoying: the special items are not significantly stronger than the default weapon, and since the player can't activate switches or pick up objects when a power-up is active, there are often instances of being forced to stand around and wait for the effect to wear off before continuing.

It's not all bad, though. The multiplayer mode can be enjoyable, as some players can focus on defeating the enemies while the others concentrate on puzzle-solving. There is also the occasional smart villain who will forgo attacking players in order to hinder their progress by swiping key items or building cannons. Even so, Disney Universe will be able to hold the interest of only very young gamers for more than a handful of levels. **—PHIL T.**

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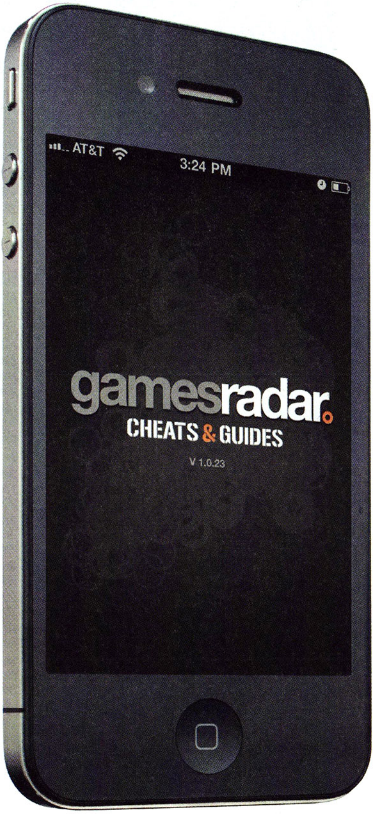

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by Samael76

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by Marcello Almaguer

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REVIEWS ARCHIVE

THE COMPLETE LIST OF NINTENDO POWER REVIEWS FROM THE PAST YEAR

SCORES REFLECT INDIVIDUAL REVIEWERS' OPINIONS

Wii

TITLE	SCORE	PUBLISHER	VOL.	ESRB
Batman: The Brave and the Bold: The Video Game	7.0	Warner Bros.	260	E10+
Bit.Trip Complete	9.0	Aksys	271	E
Captain America: Super Soldier	5.5	Sega	270	T
Cars 2: The Video Game	7.0	Disney	269	E10+
Conduit 2	7.5	Sega	266	T
Create	5.0	Electronic Arts	262	E
de Blob 2	8.0	THQ	265	E
Deca Sports 3	4.5	Hudson	261	E
Despicable Me: The Game	4.0	D3Publisher	258	E10+
DJ Hero 2	9.0	Activision	262	T
Donkey Kong Country Returns	8.5	Nintendo	262	E
Driver San Francisco	4.5	Ubisoft	271	T
Epic Mickey	8.5	Disney	263	E
FIFA Soccer 11	8.0	Electronic Arts	260	E
FIFA Soccer 12	8.0	EA Sports	272	E
FlingSmash	7.5	Nintendo	261	E
Flip's Twisted World	6.0	Majesco	260	E
GoldenEye 007	8.5	Activision	262	T
Green Lantern: Rise of the Manhunters	4.0	Warner Bros.	270	E10+
Guilty Party	7.0	Disney	259	E
Guitar Hero: Warriors of Rock	8.0	MTV	261	T
Gunblade NY & LA Machineguns Arcade Hits Pack	5.5	Sega	259	T
Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows—Part 1	4.0	Electronic Arts	262	T
Ivy the Kiwi?	7.5	XSEED	259	E
Kirby's Epic Yarn	8.5	Nintendo	261	E
Kirby's Return to Dream Land	8.5	Nintendo	272	E10+
Kung Fu Panda 2	2.5	THQ	268	E10+
LEGO Pirates of the Caribbean: The Video Game	7.0	Disney	268	E10+
LEGO Star Wars III: The Clone Wars	8.0	LucasArts	266	E10+
Legend of the Guardians: The Owls of Ga'Hoole	4.5	Warner Bros.	260	E10+
The Lord of the Rings: Aragorn's Quest	5.5	Warner Bros.	260	T
Lost In Shadow	8.0	Hudson	263	E10+
Madden NFL 11	8.5	Electronic Arts	258	E
Madden NFL 12	7.0	Electronic Arts	271	E
Mario Sports Mix	8.0	Nintendo	264	E
Metroid: Other M	8.5	Nintendo	259	T
Michael Jackson: The Experience	6.5	Ubisoft	262	E10+
MySims Skyheroes	7.5	Electronic Arts	260	E10+
Mystery Case Files: The Malgrave Incident	6.0	Nintendo	269	E
Namco Museum Megamix	5.0	Namco Bandai	261	E
Naruto Shippuden: Dragon Blade Chronicles	4.5	Tomy	262	E10+
NASCAR 2011: The Game	3.0	Activision	269	E
NBA 2K11	6.5	2K Sports	261	E
NBA Jam	9.0	Electronic Arts	260	E
NHL Slapshot	6.0	Electronic Arts	259	E
Pac-Man Party	4.5	Namco Bandai	262	E10+
PokéPark Wii: Pikachu's Adventure	7.5	Nintendo	261	E
Rango	5.0	Paramount	266	E10+
Raving Rabbids Travel In Time	6.5	Ubisoft	262	E10+
Rio	4.0	THQ	267	E
Rock Band 3	9.0	MTV	261	T
Rune Factory: Tides of Destiny	8.0	Natsume	272	E10+
Samurai Warriors 3	6.0	Nintendo	260	T
Sengoku Basara: Samurai Heroes	7.0	Capcom	261	T
Sid Meier's Pirates!	8.5	2K Games	260	E10+
Sonic Colors	9.0	Sega	261	E
Spider-Man: Shattered Dimensions	8.0	Activision	260	T
SpongeBob SquigglePants	7.0	THQ	266	E
Star Wars: The Force Unleashed II	8.0	LucasArts	261	T
Super Mario All-Stars	9.0	Nintendo	263	E
Swords	5.0	Majesco	260	T
Thor: God of Thunder	5.5	Sega	267	T
Tiger Woods PGA Tour 12: The Masters	8.5	Electronic Arts	266	E
Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon	6.0	Ubisoft	262	T
Top Spin 4	7.0	2K Sports	266	E
Transformers: Cybertron Adventures	5.0	Activision	258	T
Transformers: Dark of the Moon—Stealth Force Edition	3.0	Activision	270	E10+
TRON: Evolution—Battle Grids	6.5	Disney	263	E10+
Virtua Tennis 4	8.0	Sega	267	E
Wii Party	7.5	Nintendo	260	E
Wii Play: Motion	7.5	Nintendo	268	E10+
Worms: Battle Islands	7.0	THQ	264	E10+
WWE All Stars	6.5	THQ	266	T
WWE SmackDown vs. Raw 2011	7.5	THQ	262	T

MORE ON:

GUNBLADE NY & LA MACHINEGUNS ARCADE HITS PACK

Though they may look terribly outdated by today's standards, these two titles were some of my favorites back in the '90s. Sure, the Wii versions lack the massive cabinet-mounted guns that were used in the arcade originals, but the gameplay is intact. Simple as it may be, the thrill of blasting wave after wave of killer robots still keeps me coming back to this collection after all these years. —PHIL T.

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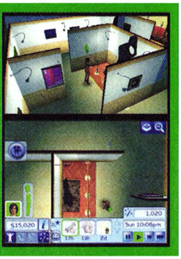
Nintendo DS

TITLE	SCORE	PUBLISHER	VOL.	ESRB
Aliens: Infestation	8.0	Sega	272	T
Atari's Greatest Hits Vol. 1	5.0	Atari	261	E
ATV Wild Ride	7.0	Destineer	264	E
Camping Mama: Outdoor Adventures	5.0	Majesco	271	E
Captain America: Super Soldier	3.5	Sega	270	E10+
Crafting Mama	7.0	Majesco	261	E
de Blob 2	8.0	THQ	265	E
Despicable Me: The Game—Minion Mayhem	7.0	D3Publisher	258	E
Dragon Quest VI: Realms of Revelation	7.5	Nintendo	265	T
Dragon Quest Monsters: Joker 2	7.5	Nintendo	271	E
Etrian Odyssey III: The Drowned City	8.5	Altus	260	E10+
Final Fantasy: The 4 Heroes of Light	8.0	Square Enix	260	E10+
Ghost Trick: Phantom Detective	9.0	Capcom	263	T
Giana Sisters DS	9.0	Destineer	265	E
Golden Sun: Dark Dawn	8.0	Nintendo	262	E10+
Green Lantern: Rise of the Manhunters	3.5	Warner Bros.	270	E10+
Harvest Moon: Grand Bazaar	6.0	Natsume	258	E
Harvest Moon: The Tale of Two Towns DS	8.0	Natsume	272	E
Ivy the Kiwi?	7.0	XSEED	259	E
Kingdom Hearts Re:coded	8.0	Square Enix	263	E10+
Kirby Mass Attack	8.0	Nintendo	271	E
Kung Fu Panda 2	4.5	THQ	268	E10+

MORE ON:

THE SIMS 3

For a portable Sims game, the Nintendo 3DS version of The Sims 3 isn't bad, but the control scheme is kind of awkward. Constantly managing things from the bottom screen's overhead view really limits the experience. —CODY M.



LEGO Battles: Ninjago	7.5	Warner Bros.	267	E
LEGO Star Wars III: The Clone Wars	8.0	LucasArts	266	E
Lufia : Curse of the Sinistrals	8.0	Natsume	260	E10+
Mario vs. Donkey Kong: Mini-Land Mayhem!	7.5	Nintendo	262	E
Monster Tale	8.0	Majesco	265	E
Naruto Shippuden: Naruto vs. Sasuke	5.0	Tomy	262	E10+
Naruto Shippuden: Shinobi Rumble	6.0	Tomy	264	T
Nine Hours, Nine Persons, Nine Doors	9.0	Aksys	262	M
Okamiden	8.0	Capcom	265	E10+
Plants vs. Zombies	9.0	PopCap	264	E10+
Pokémon Black and Pokémon White Versions	9.0	Nintendo	265	E
Pokémon Ranger: Guardian Signs	7.0	Nintendo	260	E
Professor Layton and the Last Specter	8.5	Nintendo	272	E10+
Professor Layton and the Unwound Future	9.0	Nintendo	260	E10+
Radiant Historia	8.5	Atlus	265	E10+
Rango	7.0	Paramount	266	E
Rio	5.5	THQ	267	E
River City Super Sports Challenge	6.0	Aksys	258	T
Rune Factory 3: A Fantasy Harvest Moon	8.5	Natsume	262	E
Solatorobo: Red the Hunter	9.0	Xseed	271	E10+
Sonic Colors	7.5	Sega	261	E
Spider-Man: Shattered Dimensions	7.0	Activision	260	E10+
Super Scribblenauts	8.5	Warner Bros.	261	E
Thor: God of Thunder	6.0	Sega	267	E10+
Transformers: Dark of the Moon—Autobots/Decepticons	3.0	Activision	270	E10+
Transformers: War for Cybertron	7.0	Activision	258	E10+
TRON: Evolution	6.5	Disney	263	E10+

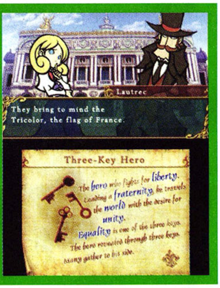
Nintendo 3DS

TITLE	SCORE	PUBLISHER	VOL.	ESRB
Asphalt 3D	6.0	Ubisoft	266	E10+
Bit.Trip Saga	8.0	Aksys	271	E
BlazBlue: Continuum Shift II	8.5	Aksys	268	T
Cartoon Network Punch Time Explosion	7.0	Crave	267	E10+
Cubic Ninja	4.0	Ubisoft	268	E
Dead or Alive Dimensions	9.0	Tecmo Koei	267	T
Deca Sports Extreme	5.0	Konami	271	E
Doctor Lautrec and the Forgotten Knights	6.5	Konami	272	E10+
Driver Renegade	3.0	Ubisoft	271	M
Dual Pen Sports	7.0	Namco Bandai	270	E10+
Face Racers: Photo Finish	4.0	Majesco	271	E
FIFA Soccer 12	7.0	EA Sports	272	E
Frogger 3D	6.5	Konami	271	E
Gabrielle's Ghostly Groove 3D	5.5	Natsume	271	E
Green Lantern: Rise of the Manhunters	4.0	Warner Bros.	270	E10+
Harvest Moon: The Tale of Two Towns 3D	7.5	Natsume	272	E
The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time 3D	9.5	Nintendo	268	E10+
LEGO Star Wars III: The Clone Wars	8.5	LucasArts	266	E10+
Madden NFL Football	6.0	Electronic Arts	266	E
Nikoli's Pencil Puzzle	6.0	Konami	272	E
nintendogs + cats	7.5	Nintendo	266	E
Pac-Man & Galaga Dimensions	7.0	Namco Bandai	269	E10+
Pet Zombies	5.5	Majesco	272	T
Pilotwings Resort	8.0	Nintendo	266	E
Pinball Hall of Fame: The Williams Collection 3D	7.0	Crave	268	E10+
Rabbids Travel in Time 3D	6.5	Ubisoft	267	E
Rayman 3D	8.0	Ubisoft	266	E
Reel Fishing Paradise 3D	6.0	Natsume	269	E
Resident Evil: The Mercenaries 3D	7.5	Capcom	269	M
Ridge Racer 3D	8.0	Namco Bandai	266	E
Samurai Warriors: Chronicles	7.0	Tecmo Koei	266	T
Shin Megami Tensei: Devil Survivor Overclocked	9.0	Atlus	271	T
The Sims 3	7.0	Electronic Arts	266	T
SpongeBob SquigglePants	7.5	THQ	267	E
Star Fox 64 3D	8.0	Nintendo	271	E
Steel Diver	8.0	Nintendo	266	E10+
Super Monkey Ball 3D	7.5	Sega	266	E
Super Street Fighter IV 3D Edition	9.0	Capcom	266	T
Tetris Axis	7.5	Nintendo	272	E
Thor: God of Thunder	6.0	Sega	272	T
Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon: Shadow Wars	8.0	Ubisoft	266	T
Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell 3D	5.5	Ubisoft	267	T
Transformers: Dark of the Moon—Stealth Force Edition	4.0	Activision	270	E10+

MORE ON:

DOCTOR LAUTREC AND THE FORGOTTEN KNIGHTS

With its intriguing characters, solid voice acting, and well-produced cut-scenes, Doctor Lautrec and the Forgotten Knights is a title I really wanted to like. It's just a shame that the actual *game* portion is less than great. —JUSTIN C.



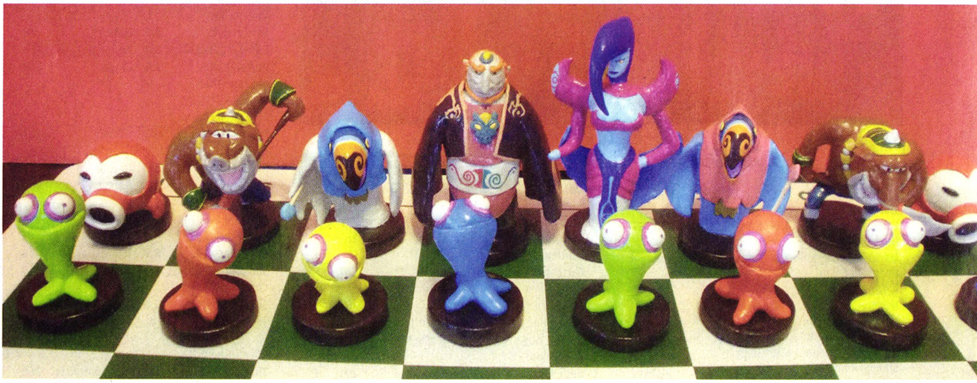
Lautrec

They bring to mind the Tricolor, the flag of France.

Three-Key Hero

The hero who fights for liberty. Leading a fraternity, he travels the world with the desire for unity. Equality is one of the three keys. The hero ventured through three keys. Many gather to his side.

COMMUNITY



FANDOM

Checkmate!

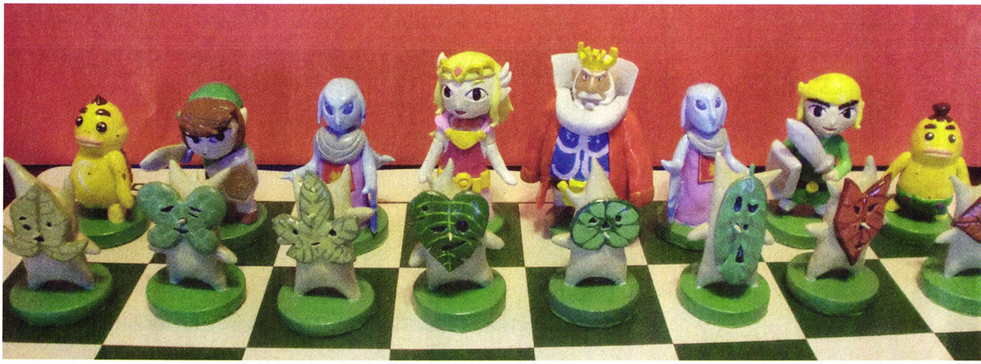
You'll never get bored with this board game.

MUCH LIKE IN CHESS, The Legend of Zelda games require a mix of cunning and strategy. And thanks to this beautiful handmade Zelda chess set from self-taught sculptor Ben Howard, it's now possible to experience both games at the same time!

Utilizing the visual style of The Legend of Zelda: The Wind Waker and the two Nintendo DS entries, Phantom Hourglass and Spirit Tracks, Howard's chess set features impeccably sculpted re-creations of beloved series characters, with hero and villain factions facing off in the classic turn-based battle. The 25-year-old retail manager from Cleveland, Ohio, has been sculpting for about 10 years, and first created a Mario-inspired chess set about five years back. After posting details of it online, a random commenter brought forth the idea of a Zelda-based set.

"Someone caught sight of the board and asked why I didn't make a Zelda set," explains Howard. "I said, 'Because there are no female antagonist characters who would fit as the [opposing] queen.' Turns out I was wrong!" When that same commenter replied with an image of Veran from The Legend of Zelda: Oracle of Ages, Howard finally had the complete cast of characters needed to pursue the set. "After that, all the other pieces fell into place," he recalls.

Howard worked on the set over a period of three months between shifts of his full-time day job, but luckily, he doesn't find the process to be mentally taxing. "After I choose characters, my brain is done



In addition to these pieces, Ben Howard has created dozens of homemade takes on popular game characters, including a set of viruses from Dr. Mario.

working," he says. "My hands and eyeballs take over pretty much 100% after that." Howard utilizes a mix of low-fire polymer clays for each piece, and once designed, he fires them, seals the surfaces, and applies primer. From there, it's a matter of detailing each piece with acrylic paints and glazing them before they're done.

The result is a stunningly original tribute to one of Nintendo's greatest creations, and each individual piece is distinct in small but meaningful ways. Unfortunately for Howard, his months spent conceiving and constructing the chess set didn't make him a better player. "I'd hoped that maybe all that time with chess would translate to some skill at actually playing chess, but I continue to lose consistently," he admits. "And with these pieces, I can't get mad and flip the table over when I lose!"

While the Zelda set is perhaps his largest project, Howard has sculpted dozens of other game characters, including Viewtiful Joe, Kraid from Metroid, and even the Purple Tentacle from Maniac Mansion. "I like picking the kinds of characters who are either so obscure or so unpopular that they will likely never see a figure made of them," he reveals, though he's also tackled more-iconic heroes, such as Mario and Kirby.

Howard chronicles all of his work at his website, fizzmanindustries.com, which includes photos and details on his many impressive sculptures from over the years.

—ANDREW H.

No two pieces are exactly alike in this custom set. Even multiple versions of the same characters have different looks or stances.

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PHOTO CHALLENGE

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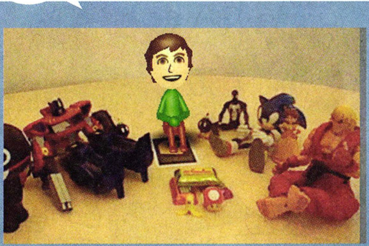
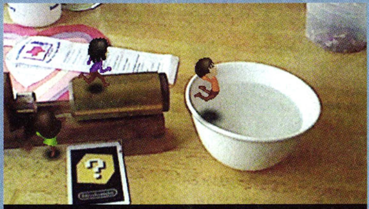


Use your Nintendo DSi or Nintendo 3DS system to snap a fun, gaming-related photo (like the one above) that matches this month's theme, then transfer the image to a computer using an SD card reader and e-mail it to the above address. We'll print the best ones. **THIS MONTH'S THEME: THANKSGIVING**

VOLUME 271'S THEME: SUMMER VACATION

PHOTOGRAPH BY GEOFFREY K.



PHOTOGRAPH BY CODY

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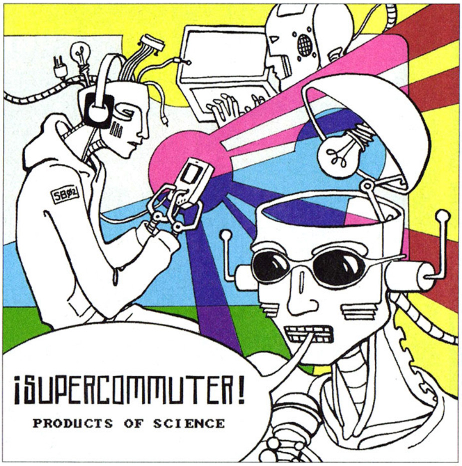
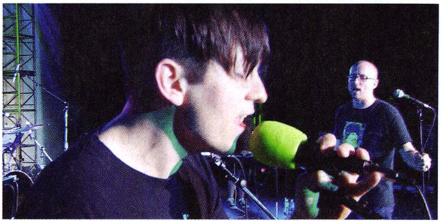


Members of the Game Boy group Supercommuter rock their sci-fi-tinged jams onstage at PAX Prime 2011.



FANDOM

The Commute Continues

Supercommuter drops another round of sci-fi-tinged Game Boy rap knowledge.

NOBODY FIRES OFF a barrage of nerdy sci-fi raps backed by infectious Game Boy grooves quite like Seattle's Supercommuter. This intriguing chip-hop group first rocked our eardrums back in 2009 with its self-titled CD debut. We're psyched the trio is at it again with an all-new album and a slew of live performances that pack a mean 8-bit punch.

Supercommuter is the brainchild of Nintendo Power alumni Andy Hartpence (aka Wheelie Cyberman) and Andy Myers (aka Stenobot), who draw musical inspiration from an unusual source: the highway. The two craft most of the music and lyrics for their robotic repertoire during lengthy commutes to and from their 9-to-5 jobs, but Myers and Hartpence are joined by producer and bandmate Tron Juan when they hit the studio to piece the final tracks together or play live gigs.

Their recently released second album, *Products of Science*, sees the group sticking to its roots while pushing into more melodic territory. "We experimented with some different ideas early on, but in the end, we decided we didn't want to stray too far from the Game Boy," explains Myers. "It's core to what Supercommuter is all about, and we didn't want to mess with that."

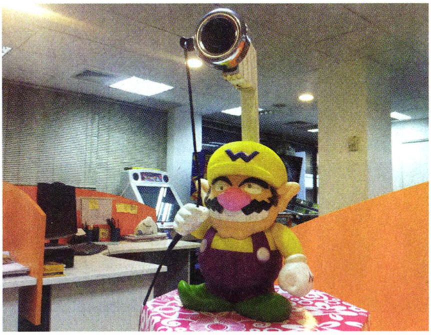
The band's first album was a near-constant stream of bleeps and words, but they decided to change things up a bit after Hartpence listened to Myers's recent solo CD. "I heard Stenobot's solo album and was blown away," Hartpence recalls. "The singing on the album was amazing, and I thought we were missing an opportunity by not having [him] sing on the new album. So we started talking about adding vocal melodies to the new project and it turned out pretty well."

Products of Science is brimming with catchy sing-along choruses and robotic back-up vocals, plus additional synth instrumentation rounds out the familiar backdrop of blips and beats churned out from the Game Boy's limited sound channels. Lyrically, the songs branch out from robot-themed topics to explore a broader swath of sci-fi subject matter, including a few that are loosely based on novels by Arthur C. Clarke.

Musical evolution is inevitable, and as a serious Pokémon fan, Hartpence discusses the group's ongoing growth in terms of that series: "There is no doubt that [we] will evolve, but there are just so many directions we could go. A Pokémon Trainer controls the direction of the evolution, and so will Supercommuter, but I don't think any of us can predict what the next album will sound like. In the end, every nuance will depend on the wonderfully variable details of the daily commute."

All proceeds from the sale of both Supercommuter albums are being donated to the Child's Play charity. You can check out the band at supercommuter.net.

—NATHAN M.



FANDOM

Greedy Bank

Wario counts a software company's money 24/7.

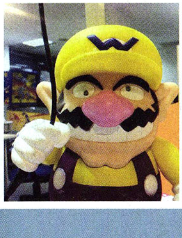
WARIO MIGHT ELEVATE greed to an all-consuming art form, and his obsession has inspired some very cool real-world tributes, but they're all dwarfed by Tiburcio de la Carcova's amazing "show me the money" Wario robot.

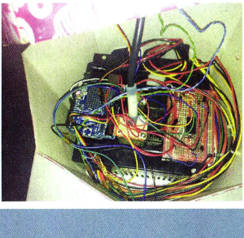
The Santiago, Chile-based Carcova is the co-founder of Atakama Labs, a software company that specializes in social games, and he was racking his brain thinking of a way to track in-game purchases for his company's newest title, Little Cave Hero. Inspiration struck when he walked into his home workshop and spied his daughter Helena's Wario figure.

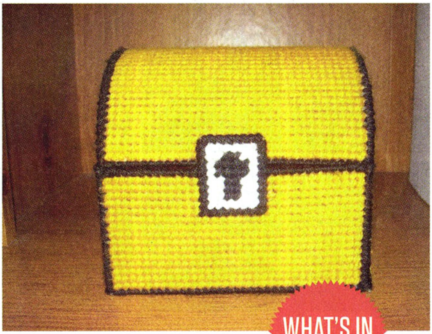
The four-year-old generously donated her toy—and time—in helping her dad solder together the impressive wireless Wario robot. Every time an in-game sale is made, its eyes light up bright green and a bell rings. If more than five sales are made in a single minute, Wario's ears emit puffs of steam from a tiny smoke machine Carcova hacked out of an RC tank.

Carcova insists it was a simple little project, but his descriptions of Arduino Uno microcontroller boards, Xbee boards, transistors, diodes, relays, and hacking some machines had us floored. "It sounds complicated, but it's really basic electronics," he says. "The wireless part is probably most of the magic because people wonder how Wario knows about the transaction if it's not connected to a computer."

He'll admit the biggest challenge was making sure Wario didn't get burned from the smoke, but that the work he put in was well worth it because of the astonished reactions it gets from his co-workers whenever a sale is reported. "With a little bit of knowledge, you can do amazing stuff." It just goes to show that being greedy has its rewards. **—DAVID W.**





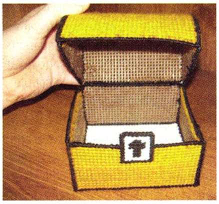


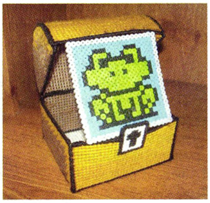
WHAT'S IN THE BOX?

FANDOM

Treasure Trove

Super Mushrooms get swapped for coasters and cards.

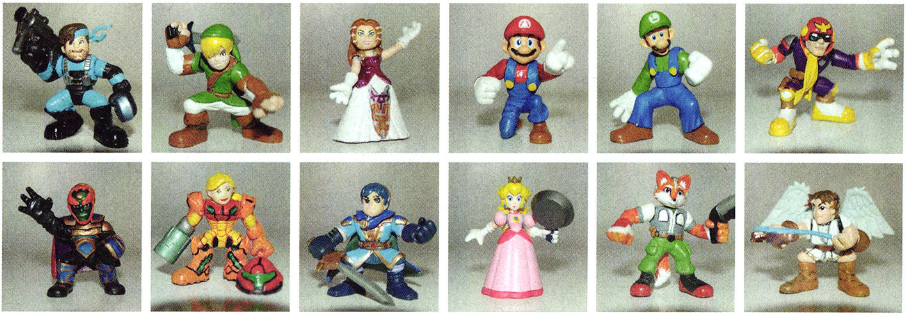




THE YELLOW treasure chests in Super Mario Bros. 3 always hold some kind of amazing power-up, but in the case of this homemade craft, the familiar design holds something quite a bit more practical: drink coasters.

Created by Jay Hanscom, a 26-year-old substitute teacher from Illinois, this sharp tribute to the iconic item-holder was designed in response to a number of fan-made drink coasters he had come across on the Internet. "I had seen a ton of Mario coasters online, but not a really good coaster-storage container," he explains. "I thought about what things in Mario's past held the items that I've seen people make coasters out of, and the treasure chest from Super Mario Bros. 3 seemed ideal."

Starting with a pattern book obtained from his grandmother, Hanscom modified a generic treasure-chest design to resemble the Super Mario Bros. 3 version. Using a perforated plastic canvas and four colors of yarn, he constructed the chest in about six hours and spent only eight dollars or so on materials. At present, however, the item is not being used as intended: "Right now it's being used to hold some of my Magic: The Gathering cards," Hanscom admits. False treasure! **—ANDREW H.**



FANDOM

Smashing Creations

This reader re-creates classic battles with custom Smash Bros. figures.

THE SUPER SMASH BROS. series lets Nintendo fans of all ages pit legendary characters from a wide variety of games against each other, but without a series of officially licensed action figures, fans who want a more tactile experience have to mix and match different toy lines (if the figures even exist). Luckily, that didn't stop Dylan Pommer from creating his own custom line of Smash Bros. action figures using a wide variety of parts from various Hasbro Heroes figures to generate a dozen familiar, bite-sized combatants.

Pommer, a 24-year-old game-design and 3D-modeling student in San Francisco, California, has been customizing action figures for a couple of years and is also an avid collector of the Hasbro Heroes toys, which include licensed Star Wars and Marvel Comics characters. With a desire to have his own set of Nintendo icons, he merged the two interests and started brainstorming ideas. "I wanted a series of Nintendo characters in the same style so I could display them with all of the other characters I already had," he explains. "I assumed it would never happen and decided to make my own toy line."

As seen in these photos, Pommer's line features 12 iconic fighters, including Mario & Luigi; Samus Aran (Metroid); Solid Snake (Metal Gear Solid); and Marth (Fire Emblem); plus Link, Zelda, and Ganondorf from The Legend of Zelda series. He admits that when choosing the subjects for his initial set, he selected some characters based in part on their shape and dimensions. "I specifically picked ones that were more humanoid because guys like Yoshi or Sonic would have been hard to do," he says. "Mario was also necessary, since you can't have anything Nintendo-related without Mario."

From there, he raided his Hasbro Heroes collection for parts, but that wasn't enough: he also sought out figures and parts on eBay, asked message-board pals for pieces, and even busted apart brand-new figures just to get the right components for each creation. While three of the figures utilize heads from official Nintendo toys, they're all otherwise composed of Hasbro Heroes pieces that have been sculpted and painted to look like the other Heroes figures.

And the pieces came from some pretty diverse sources within the Hasbro Heroes line. "Samus's body and legs are from Iron Man, and Marth's head is from a Luke Skywalker [figure]," notes Pommer. Samus in particular required a lot of extra sculpting to shed the original Iron Man design, but as you can see, the results are highly impressive.

Pommer is now starting to work on custom figures using Disney's Vinylmation line, and is also experimenting with airbrush painting to further improve his products. He hasn't ruled out the possibility of filling out the complete set of Smash Bros. brawlers at some point, so he may one day be able to generate every plastic matchup conceivable. At least, until the next Smash Bros. inevitably expands the series's lineup. **—ANDREW H.**

Reader Corey Hitchcock says her costumes are never "done," but we think they're pretty awesome in their current state.

COSPLAY

Crafty Gamer

This girl takes dressing up very seriously.

SOME FOLKS are satisfied by dressing up in costumes only on Halloween. However, devoted cosplayers like Corey Hitchcock, an 18-year-old Western Carolina University student hoping to major in costuming, know those people are severely limiting themselves. Hitchcock started cosplaying in 2008 at Animazement as Etna from Disgaea: Hour Of Darkness. But Hitchcock's love of donning disguises and acting like a character stretches all the way back to kindergarten, when she started doing theater. Attending conventions as an observer inspired her, and she dived in headfirst.

"Etna is one of my favorite characters, plain and simple," explains Hitchcock. "She's cute, tough, smart, and abusive in a funny way. I couldn't resist the urge to have an excuse to beat up my Prinny plushie." The costume was a huge hit, though not with her mom initially. "My mother was extremely displeased, because Etna is a half-dressed demon and at the time I was an underage teenage girl," she says. "But my mother, because she is wonderful and because she loves me, put aside her misgivings and helped me make one of the best darned costumes ever."

Mom and daughter have since bonded even more over this shared interest—so much so that Hitchcock says cosplaying and sewing new costumes helps her feel connected to home while away at college. She hopes someday to pass this tradition down to her kids, too: "If I ever have kids, I will be dressing those lucky little guys up like young Link and young Zelda, or Kuni and Nami [from Okamiden and One Piece, respectively]."

In the meantime, she plans to eventually cosplay as female characters from every Yoshitaka Amano-designed Final Fantasy up through FFVI—even if it means twisting the source material a little bit. "I'm hoping to do Rosa and Maria soon, and maybe Princess Sara.... Red Mage [from the first FF] ended up being a guy, [so] I'll make a female Black Mage; that'll be awesome!"

We're inclined to agree, though what's really awesome is Hitchcock's resourcefulness. Her costumes are never "done." She's always making alterations to them. For instance, most recently she tweaked her Celes costume to add a pearl ribbon, then redid the shoulder armor, and finally restyled the wig to accommodate other accessories she plans to integrate later.

To build her costumes, Hitchcock scours the Internet, craft stores, and thrift stores. (She exclaims, "I can't believe some of the things people throw out! Old football pads make excellent armor.") She spends the money earned from odd jobs and holiday presents to support her hobby—though when she's short on cash she'll also make original artwork to sell.

Hitchcock thinks everyone should cosplay. She offers, "It doesn't matter about your level of skill or your looks. All that matters is your enthusiasm." We agree, and we're impressed that Hitchcock's enthusiasm seems unparalleled.

—DAVID W.

PHOTOGRAPHS BY CHERIE OUTEN

The Legend of Zelda: Skyward Sword and Mario Kart 7 are finally almost here—can you believe it? We'll have full reviews for you next issue, along with a Buyer's Guide stuffed with even more holiday must-haves.

NEXT MONTH

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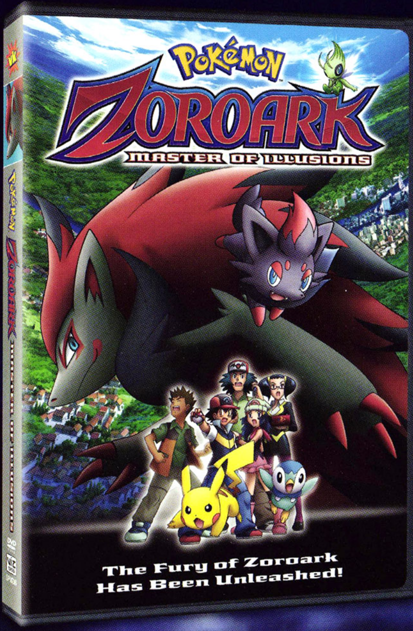
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